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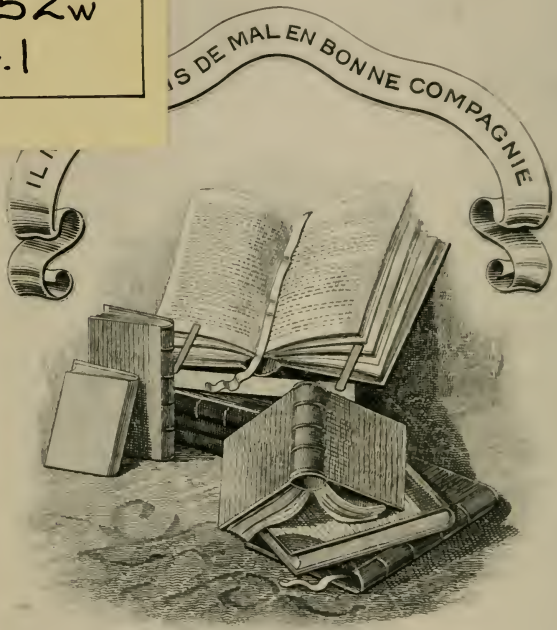

Louisa S. B. Walton.

From Richard Pryce

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WINIFRED MOUNT

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A NOVEL

BY

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'MISS MAXWELL'S AFFECTIONS,' 'TIME AND THE WOMAN,'

ETC., ETC.

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WINIFRED MOUNT

CHAPTER I

IF happiness be as evenly distributed as some men would have us think, then must Winifred Mount hold her physical attractions, and such trifling consolations as that she was well fed, well clothed, well housed in the light of compensations for the dull monotony of the life that was hers up to her eighteenth year. Other girls went home for the holidays, and returned to school bringing with them accounts of the outer world of which Winifred knew so little. Thus at second hand she learnt something of places where discipline and use made way for freedom and beauty. What other knowledge she had of the world was gathered from books. And the books, while they were a delight in themselves, were the source of

her discontent. They were for her the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she knew the dreariness of her lot. They told her that she was in prison, that her prison was narrow, and that the world, of which she could see but a meagre slice as she gazed with longing and wondering eyes through the straight and barred windows of her prison-house, was broad and sunny and decked with flowers which should be hers to pluck. Others plucked them and showed her bunches of sweet blossoms.

Agatha Twine, a strange girl, whose hysterical tendencies had showed themselves indirectly in a lack of interest in all that surrounded her at home, here at Choseville, to which she had been sent by the advice of a doctor, was never tired of talking to Winifred of country life; of horses and hunting; of autumn woods and the sound of the gun; of lunches with the shooters in old farm houses; of the coming and the going of guests, and of the thousand things that make up the daily round of easy and prosperous country life.

Elsie Luttrell told her of London.

'Your life is the same—the life of you two,' she said to these girls. 'You meet at each other's houses. You map out your time so that all of it is filled.'

'Are you *sure* you haven't any relations, Winifred?'

'My father,' said Winifred.

'But you must have other relations—aunts, I mean (we all have aunts!), and cousins, and—and things of that sort.'

'I don't know of any—things of that sort,' said Winifred.

She did not smile. The topic was one of frequent discussion.

'Winifred will turn out to be a princess,' said the London girl merrily. 'You have probably been put here for family reasons, and when you are grown up—quite grown up, I mean—they will be removed, they always are half-way through the book, and you will be received back into your kingdom.'

'I used to expect something once,' said Winifred, 'but I have given up hoping for anything.'

She looked up at the schoolhouse as she spoke. Her prison did not look uncheerful with the sun blazing upon its green shutters. One of the younger girls was swinging in the garden. At a certain point the child swung out of the shade of the trees, and then her hair made a flash of gold which caught Winifred's attention. She was watching for it when her friend spoke again.

'Madame de Valois must know.'

'She knows as little as I do.'

'But you have been with her almost your whole life. She must know something.'

'I don't think she knows more than she has told me for all that. I was talking to her again the other day. She doesn't think that my father can be poor, because he has paid her very well for me —"handsomely" was her word.'

'I am sure Madame de Valois' word was "'anseumly,"' said Elsie Luttrell the London girl.

She mimicked the voice and face of the schoolmistress as she spoke, and Agatha Twine the country-house girl laughed.

Madame de Valois herself crossed the garden at this moment.

'You amuse yourselves, mesdemoiselles. That is right. Miss Luttrell, your music lesson at four, remember. Your hat Winifred, the sun, your complexion!'

Madame de Valois had a passion for giving directions.

'It doesn't matter much about that, madame,' said Winifred.

'My dear, some day you think differently.'

She passed on down the path, and for five minutes the girls could see her blue shawl among

the shrubs and flowers before it disappeared into the house.

'She's not a bad old thing,' said Elsie. 'Look, girls: "Some day you tink differently."'

In a moment Miss Luttrell's face had twisted itself into a resemblance to that of Madame de Valois. The likeness was creditably recognisable, and Agatha and Winifred laughed.

There was something that was beguiling in the expression of Winifred's face when merriment took the discontented curl from her lips. The keynote of her life at the period it had reached was dissatisfaction, and the look of protest and mutiny which her features so often wore threatened to become habitual. This disappeared, however, completely when she laughed, and the potential light-heartedness of her nature revealed itself. She was cramped in her narrow surroundings.

Elsie ought to have been an actress,' said Agatha presently; 'oughtn't she, Winifred?'

'There isn't the least occasion for that,' said Winifred. 'You take to the stage as a way of escape from yourself, or to use it as an outlet—just as a certain type of school-girl writes poetry. You don't want an escape from yourself if you are lucky enough to live a large life. Elsie's lot

is cast in very pleasant places, and she will find plenty of scope for acting there.'

Elsie, beginning to laugh, was on the point of saying that Winifred spoke like a book, when something in the speaker's face caused her to be less frivolous.

'I don't know about the large life,' she said instead. 'What do you call a large life, and how do you know that I am going to lead it?'

Winifred ignored the interruption, and continued,—

'I believe that nine-tenths of the women that take to the stage do it for the reasons that—that will perhaps make me think of it some day as the one way of getting freedom.'

'Winifred,' said Agatha, primly.

Some English dancing girls had visited Choseville recently, and the performance having been pronounced good of its kind, and harmless, Madame de Valois had taken a few of the older girls to see it. Elsie Luttrell had during the last holidays had a few lessons in skirt-dancing, but to Winifred the thing had all the charm of novelty.

'It is a way,' she said, 'and I have been thinking of it lately. I have been thinking of all the ways. I could dance like those girls.'

She jumped up from her seat as she spoke,

and, humming a waltz, she moved gracefully to the swaying measure of the air. She was supple, and controlled with sufficient accuracy the balance of her body. The lines of her figure were bold and noble. The promise of her beauty was unmistakable. Elsie Luttrell was moved to enthusiasm.

'I saw a photograph of Miss Boston, in the holidays—the American girl that everyone was talking about. She is supposed to be lovely. She isn't a patch on you, Winifred.'

Miss Mount did not reply. She finished her waltz.

'Whistle that whistling tune, Agatha—the thing Emmeline Blood heard at the Christie Ministrels.'

'*Défendu*,' said Miss Twine. 'I had a *pénitence* last week for whistling.'

'Well, then, Elsie,' said Winifred; 'though I don't see, Agatha, why you should be afraid to break the rules when it is your last term.'

Miss Luttrell without any ado began to whistle and Winifred began to dance. Agatha Twine listened and watched for a few moments in silence, and then composed her lips to an O and whistled too.

Winifred's skirts swung out in the quicker movement of her steps. Her small feet played lightly

on the smooth lawn. An expert would have seen that the scheme of the dance was unconsidered; but the charm and the grace of it were patent, and potent too.

'I can't finish it,' she said, laughing. 'It ought to end up with a sort of stamp at the last note —a sort of staccato step. You know—'

'And you ought to look at the audience with defiant self-approval, and with a sort of surprise at finding them there,' said Elsie Luttrell. 'You could do that—the defiance, I mean.'

The self-approval too, thought Winifred, if she knew that her art was good; but she did not say so. She had an idea that Agatha Twine would not have understood. Moreover, Agatha said at this moment,—

'What a lot of sorts! A sort of stamp, a sort of staccato step, a sort of surprise.'

'Hear me sing a song of sorts,' cried Elsie, and with modestly lowered eyelids she gave a verse of one of those things that periodically drive London mad. The facial changes of expression from primness to unrestraint as she plunged into the refrain with a kick and a curious movement of her elbows was wonderful. Madame de Valois would have been horrified, and Elsie's end-of-the-age mother would have been delighted.

'How dreadful of you, Elsie,' said Agatha.

Winifred said nothing for a few moments. She was looking at Elsie as if she saw her now for the first time.

'Why have you never done that before?' she asked when at last she spoke.

Elsie shook her head.

'I have never been able to remember the tune,' she said, smiling. 'It only came into my head just now—quite suddenly.'

When four o'clock struck Miss Luttrell said Bother, and went to her music lesson. Agatha looked after her.

'I hope Elsie will turn out well,' she said.

'How middle-aged of you,' said Winifred.

There was a pause. Elsie had reached the house, and at the door she glanced back and gave once more the curious movement of her elbows. Then she entered with downcast eyes and folded hands.

'I love Elsie,' said Winifred.

'I like her too,' said Agatha.

There was another pause.

'Mamma doesn't care very much for her mother,' said Agatha then. 'She is a widow, and she entertains a great deal. Mamma says she is socially successful.'

'Socially successful?'

'It means having your guests asked for you by someone else,' said Agatha.

The sound of Miss Luttrell's inaccuracies on the piano came from a green-shuttered window.

'I love Elsie,' said Winifred again.

'She will never play,' said Agatha.

'She will never want to,' said Winifred. 'She has splendid health and splendid spirits. She will not have to go to music for consolation.'

'You look at things from such strange points of view,' said Agatha. 'You take everything as a weapon or a shelter or a—how shall I put it? I can't quite express what I mean. You appear to look at life as a fight.'

'So it is,' said Winifred.

At this period, and as the result of her unusual circumstances, her place in the world seemed to be that of a combatant. Her cynicism had come before its time, and there was therefore the hope that since it came not of maturity it might grow less persistent as years should pass. There was nothing in her actual life that was unhappy. Madame de Valois treated her with kindness and affection. She was liked by her companions, and, if some of them indeed stood in awe of her, there was not in the school one who did not secretly

admire her. Yet her life seemed to lack everything.

'We all have the right to be happy—an equal right,' she said presently. 'Don't you think it is an equal right?'

She addressed Agatha, but she looked at the swing. She had been looking at it for some moments before she saw that the golden-haired child had given place to a bigger girl, who sat clumsily in the seat, and whose black head gave out no flash of colour when the sun struck it.

Agatha thought before she replied. The question had a Socialistic ring, and Agatha, by inheritance, disapproved of Socialism. She had all the old views, so she fenced.

'It depends upon what is meant by happiness,' she said.

Winifred knew that. She shrugged her shoulders. The conversation turned to other matters. The piano rattled on and presently ceased. Then Miss Luttrell made her appearance and joined her friends.

Agatha appealed to her on the question of happiness.

'Oh,' said Winifred, 'it doesn't matter. I don't know why I raised the point.'

'And I have no opinions,' cried Elsie merrily;

'and I have done my practising, and I don't mean to do another thing for the rest of the day. To what mischief can I lend my idle hands? Let us turn Black Alice out of the swing. Come, girls. Winifred, you will remember some day that I told you you were a princess, and would be restored to your kingdom. It isn't as if you had done anything to forfeit your rights.'

Winifred laughed.

'I have been here since I was three,' she said.

CHAPTER II

THUS stood three girls upon the threshold of life.

Agatha Twine and Elsie Luttrell were leaving at the end of the term. Winifred was to remain, as she had remained year after year at the seasons that saw the breaking up of the school. It seemed to be her destiny—to stay behind.

She set her teeth.

'I will write to you every week,' said Agatha.

'You must come and stay with us,' said Elsie.

Both girls kissed her.

The omnibus was at the door. All was confusion and excitement, and Winifred was outside it and apart. Girls ran up and down the stairs. Faces were flushed and eyes sparkled. Madame de Valois stood upon the steps and gave directions shrilly. She was rapidly reducing to a state of distraction bordering on frenzy the governess who was to convoy the home-going party. Miss Vance, cooling down in the train later on, and recovering some of her scattered wits, allowed to herself that

there had been a moment at which she had not known a trunk from its owner, nor the seventeen tickets from an umbrella or a packet of sandwiches. All had been shaken round in her head till selection and distribution were impossible.

'You have the money for the extra in the boat,' said Madame de Valois. 'Be sure you ask, and do not pay too much. Now, see that you have it right —the difference for the class. Of course I gave it to you. Are you dreaming, Miss Vance? I think you are demented. Look in your purse, quick. You will miss the train. Where is your purse? Why, you put it in your bag yourself; I saw you. There it is—now, count. Two, four, six, *comme ça*— and Alice Brown is not to stay on deck. You hear me—and she is to wear her coat all the time, and the muffler for her throat. And at Dover you are to ask which part of the train is for Victoria and which part for Charing Cross. You go yourself to Charing Cross, and you give the young ladies who go to Victoria into charge to the guard. Now, you understand, and make no mistake. Now, look! look! You leave the tickets behind if you do that. Put them in your bag at once. And the money for baggage. Like that. And see that no one forgets her wraps. And if Nora Green is troublesome on the way you are to report her to me. Now, quick,

you must go. *En voiture*, mesdemoiselles. Goodbye all of you. Now, quick, or you miss the train. Where is Bertha Lane? Quick!'

The girls scrambled into the omnibus. Miss Vance, with flushed face and full hands and harassed eyes, followed her charges into the vehicle. She found presently that she had forgotten her own bundle of shawls, but she had not the courage to stop the driver and send back for it. Happily one of the servants discovered it in time to meet her with it at the station.

The scene was repeated in all its details at the end of every term.

Winifred Mount, with a grim expression, watched the omnibus out of sight. She waved her handkerchief to Elsie Luttrell, but she did not smile.

Madame de Valois gave a sigh of relief and turned into the house. Winifred went round into the empty garden. It looked inexpressibly empty. The silence, too, struck her with a sense of desertion. She looked down the still paths. The swing did not move. Nothing moved. The day was grey. She looked up at the house. The shutters were all pushed back and the windows were open. Not a sign of life to be seen at one of them.

She sat down moodily on the bench where she had sat with her two friends. They were on their

way to their bright futures, these two girls, and she was left behind. Would nothing move in the empty garden? The sight of Black Alice, the unpopular girl, in the swing would have been grateful. Black Alice monopolised the swing. She turned the smaller girls out of it habitually, and she was heartily disliked amongst her schoolfellows, but Winifred would have welcomed even her. The solitude was horrible. Eight weeks of empty days must pass before the girls returned. Eight weeks of being alone. She shuddered at the thought, and the expression of sullenness deepened upon her face.

There was the sound of an opening door, and Winifred looked round. It was Madame de Valois who approached her. Winifred rose to her feet from respectful custom, but she neither smiled nor did she advance to meet her.

'What would you like to do to-day?' said Madame de Valois kindly. 'I am sorry that I have no holiday amusements for you; but we could drive this afternoon if you like?'

'If you wish it, madame,' said Winifred.

'But it is you, my dear. It is for you.'

'I do not care,' said Winifred.

'My dear, I wanted to please you.'

Madame de Valois' tone told Winifred that she had been ungracious.

'It was kind of you to think of it,' she hastened to say. 'Madame, you must forgive me to-day.'

The schoolmistress laid a gentle hand upon her shoulder.

'My dear, I understand you.'

It was then, and quite suddenly, that Winifred sank down upon the bench and covered her face with her hands. Winifred seldom wept. She had a pride that did not make tears come easily to her. Madame de Valois did not remember that she had ever seen her overcome before. She sat down beside her, and put her arms round her.

'How long is it to go on?' said Winifred, as soon as her sobbing could allow her to speak articulately. 'How long is it to go on? Am I to be alone all my life? Am I always to be left behind? It is killing me. It is hardening me. What have I done?'

She could not control herself. She was shaken by the passion of tears that possessed her. Her beautiful young body was convulsed. Madame de Valois did not try to stay the outburst. It scarcely surprised her, for she was not unobservant, and she had known that sooner or later the forces which she had seen at work in Winifred must lead to an outward expression of her revolt. She had long foreseen the effect upon a thinking

and passionate nature of the life of exile to which the girl had been condemned. She had, of course, her own conjectures as to the probable reason for this exile, but, as Winifred supposed, she was ignorant as the girl herself of the actual facts of the case.

So long as Winifred was a child she had taken her lot as her lot with little question. She had been content with such information as Madame de Valois could give her. She knew that her circumstances were different from those of other girls, and she accepted the contrast without combating its justice. She even derived a certain satisfaction from its mystery. She knew that she had a father, but that she never wrote to him. Madame de Valois had told her that, in accordance with his wishes, as expressed in the instructions which he had given to her, his daughter was not to communicate with him. For many years this sufficed for Winifred. She was kindly treated, she had all that she wanted in the way of clothes and pocket-money, and if she had not the amusements of other girls, she had never had them, and therefore could not miss them.

But time had opened her eyes. It was inevitable. Madame de Valois had known that the day must come when Winifred would demand the

explanation which it would not be in her power to give. She had indeed told her all that she knew.

For long now had she watched the deepening mutiny of Winifred's expression. A thousand chance words, or gestures, had prepared her for the storm that was brewing. Her affection for her pupil was real and warm, and she saw her discontent and unhappiness with concern.

'My dear,' she said softly, 'my dear.'

She kissed the silky hair. How beautiful it was, and how long. It was rich in colour and luxurious, and it had waves and undulations that no hairdresser's art could have achieved. Moreover, it had a lustre of which even the grey day with the low clouds could not rob it.

After a time Winifred recovered her self-control.

'I am going to write to my father,' she said.

She spoke very quietly.

Madame de Valois was perhaps prepared for some active step for she made no protest. Winifred was surprised. In her present mood opposition would not have been without a certain attraction for her. It would have strengthened her determination. She had expected to have to fight for permission to carry out her project. She had half wished indeed that the permission

would be refused, and that she would have the opportunity of taking the law into her own hands. She was in a frame of mind for open rebellion.

As Madame de Valois did not gainsay her, she proceeded.

'I am going to demand to go home. Why should I be left here year after year as if I belonged to nobody? It is unjust. I have stood the neglect of my father long enough. I am seventeen now. I am at the age when girls leave school, and I am going to force my father to acknowledge me.'

Winifred spoke without vehemence as yet, but the trembling of her hand told how great was the effort to maintain her composure. Madame de Valois still preserved her silence. In truth, she did not know how to reply. When, at length, she answered it was with a warning that acted as an irritant to Winifred's strained nerves.

'I cannot prevent your writing. I have your father's instructions that he does not wish to hear from you; but if you demand his address I do not see that I can withhold it. But have a care, my dear, have a care. You may bring upon yourself some knowledge which had best be kept from you.'

'What do you mean, madame?'

'I know nothing. There must be reasons, family reasons. . . . I cannot tell. You would not understand . . .'

'I think I should understand,' said Winifred. 'I think I know what you mean. I am not a child, and, in any case, it is for girls situated as I am to know things before their time. Such knowledge can be kept from happier girls.'

Madame de Valois looked at her in amazement.

And if I am what you think—and I don't care if I am. I don't care! I don't care! I don't care! —then it seems to me that my claims upon my father are but ten times greater.'

'Winifred!'

Madame de Valois could say nothing else.

'Why should I care?' said Winifred, more quietly. 'If it is true it is not my fault. There may be children who will accept the punishment of the sins of their fathers, but I am not one of them. If what you think is the real explanation of my circumstances, then I refuse to allow it to affect my life. I refuse, that is all. I am as good as girls more happily born. I am not to be trampled on. I want life, and I will have it. I will have it.'

Madame de Valois could only look at Winifred

and gasp. She had no words to meet the philosophy of this girl, who, shut away from the outer world, had somehow absorbed the modern spirit. That this development should have proceeded unobserved under her very eyes was matter enough for surprise, but that Winifred's views and attitude should symbolise those of the most-advanced tendencies of latter day civilisation was matter for a further wonder still. She had then never known this girl who had grown up beside her and in her care. In the light of the knowledge that had just been vouchsafed to her she could only marvel, too, at the recent tears. Such independence of circumstances as Winifred had just shown seemed at first incompatible with the exhibition of the weaker emotions. Subsequent thought, however, made both phases of feeling intelligible to her.

The greyness of the day began to lift. An aperture in the veil of cloud allowed a glimpse of bluest sky behind. The sun struggled out presently and gilded half the world. The flowers and trees asserted their colours. The greens and reds were most vivid. Some points of glass or pebble sparkled like diamonds in the brown soil of a bed.

Winifred looked down the garden and noted absently the change in the day. The sunlight

against a dark background of cloud was brilliant, and insisted on a comparison to gold. Birds which had been twittering began to sing. A tortoiseshell cat came daintily towards Madame de Valois and rubbed itself luxuriously against her knees. Presently it stretched itself in the sunlight on the grass at her feet. The yellow eyes of the animal gleamed.

The pause which succeeded Winifred's words seemed likely to last. Madame broke the silence.

'My dear, you shall write to your father. I do not think that I should be justified in preventing you. I will write to him myself and tell him this. I have hitherto followed implicitly his instructions, but it is true what you say; you are no more a child. I have known it for long, and yet it seems to me as if to-day for the first time I grasp the meaning. My dear, we must jump to no conclusions. Part of what has been said to-day, I shall never cease to regret—never!'

'I regret nothing that has been said,' said Winifred. 'I mean to face things through life. I wish things to face me. I want to see clearly. Above all, I want to face the unalterable.'

CHAPTER III

WINIFRED made two beginnings to her letter: 'My dear father,' 'Dear father,' and rejected them for a third which was allowed to stand.

The letter that was posted ran thus:—

'MAISON ROUGE, CHOSEVILLE,
'FRANCE, 15*th July*.

'FATHER,—Though I know from Madame de Valois that it is your wish that I should not communicate with you, I have made up my mind to write to you. The restrictions that you imposed upon me as a child can no longer bind me. I suppose that the relations between father and daughter were never more curious than in our case. I do not know you. If I have ever had any recollection of you, and it seems to me that in the early days I had some vague remembrance of you, time has entirely effaced it. I don't know whether you are old or young. I don't know whether I have any relations but yourself. All

that I know is, that for more than fourteen years you have ignored my existence. My mother I have been told is dead; but in the general uncertainty of all that concerns me I know nothing more about her. Was injustice ever greater than this! I live, and you are responsible for my life. I ask you, in common fairness, to think of this. I cannot tell how you will receive this letter. I am writing as I feel. Remember that I am as one in the dark. If I knew you I might express myself differently. I cannot tell; and so I put down facts baldly. There may be circumstances which, if I knew them, would throw a new light upon your treatment of me. In my ignorance you must forgive me if I have only seen it as harsh. Father, I could love you, and there are moments when I hate you. Shall I cross that out or leave it? I think I will leave it. It expresses me, and if you are a friend you will understand; if not, I do not care how it strikes you. I must learn now what you propose for my future. I am seventeen, and I believe that I am older than my actual years. You will see that this is probable if you consider how likely it is that I have had to think things out for myself. I have not been unhappy here. Madame de Valois has taken the place of parents to me, and I love her dearly.

But I cannot stay here. I am grown up. I have done with lesson books as lesson books. I like study for its own sake but my schooldays are past, and this must be recognised. I believe that you are, if not rich, at least, well off. You have supplied me liberally with money, and I know from other girls that this school is expensive. If you will not have me to live with you, I ask you now to make me a settled allowance. I will get a maid or a companion of some sort, and I will make a life for myself. I am independent by nature, and I should like to travel or make a home for myself in England. There is a question which I must ask you. I cannot tell how you will regard it, but it was inevitable that such a hypothesis should suggest itself as an explanation of my circumstances. Am I legitimate? I can bear the answer whatever it is, but I must know. Once I know my position, I shall be able to take my bearings and face the future.

'If you wish me well, do not judge me by the antagonism of parts of this letter. If you are a friend the antagonism is not there, and if you are a foe, I don't care what you think. This is my nature.

'Father, write to me.—Your daughter,

'WINIFRED MOUNT.'

'*P.S.*—Have you any wish to know what I am like? I am sending you a photograph which was taken here the other day.'

Winifred did not show this letter to anyone. She had a conviction that Madame de Valois would disapprove of it, would wish to modify it, would even be shocked at its bluntness. And Winifred knew that she was prepared to alter nothing. What she had written she had written. She had but presented herself to her father in the attitude that was natural to her. If at the outset she offended him, then must the offence be.

Madame de Valois gave her the address. Winifred heard it with interest—Monkswood, Priarton, Cornwall. She had wondered whether it would awake any slumbering memories. It did not.

'You have written respectfully, I hope,' said madame. 'My dear, I hope I have not been wrong in permitting you to write.'

'I have written respectfully,' said Winifred. 'You must not take any responsibility in the matter. I think I had better tell you, with all deference, that you could not have prevented my writing. You could have withheld the address, but I should have sought means to learn it. Oh, don't think that I don't care for your wishes. I do, I

do. What should I have done all these years but for your affection and advice? But in this matter I had to act for myself.'

She kissed the Frenchwoman as she spoke.

'My dear, it is your life. I have no right to influence you. God grant that good may come of the step you have taken.'

A week passed. After the third day of it Winifred watched the posts. She was more excited as to the result of her letter than she would have owned. She was a good deal alone at this time, and she had much opportunity for speculation and conjecture. At one moment she wished that she had written more humbly; at another that she had laid even more emphasis upon her sense of the injustice that had been done to her. Then nervousness took possession of her. She felt like one who has set some huge piece of machinery in motion by the pressing of a button or the drawing of a bolt, and awaits the result of the action in ignorance and trembling. She had known monotony, but she had known peace and security. What if she had disturbed these for ever!

It was after such a mood of despondence and fear that her defiant courage came to her aid. Let the future do its worst. She was strong in body and in will. She could brave difficulties, and con-

quer them too. She was equipped by nature for a fight with foes stronger than any that were likely to assail her. She had the gift of the independent spirit that overrides the waves of adverse circumstance.

Madame de Valois watched her mood, but was silent. Inwardly she experienced a solicitude which she found it difficult to conceal, for the effect of the girl's appeal or protest. From what she knew of Winifred, she suspected that the letter had been more in the form of protest than appeal. She tried from the very short communications which from time to time she had received from Mr Mount to form some idea of his personality; but his correspondence with her had been so generally of a business nature that it was impossible to judge from it of the man. She had never seen him, and she was obliged to own, after a morning spent at the writing-table that held his letters, that they told her nothing.

Winifred tried to read, tried to work, tried to play. Her thoughts were in Cornwall. Perhaps her father was writing to her at this moment, or at that. Perhaps he was away and had not received her letter. Perhaps he intended to ignore it as he had ignored his daughter.

Was Monkswood a country place such as Agatha Twine had described to her? Was it on the coast

or inland? This sent her to her atlas, but Priarton was not marked in the map. She thought that Priarton must be a village, and Monkswood a small, perhaps a large, estate. Probably there was no train to Priarton. It amused her presently to know into what details of conjecture she was going when she found herself imagining note paper stamped with the address, and with 'Station So-and-so,' 'Telegrams, Priarton.' Was the country hilly and rocky and wild? She hoped that there were hills, because Choseville and its neighbourhood were flat and uninteresting. Then she remembered that to form any hopes whatever as to the nature of her father's home was perhaps futile. She might never see it. Thus did she pass the time of waiting in uncertainty. On the eighth day there arrived the letter she was expecting. It was directed to herself. Madame de Valois saw her change colour as it was put into her hands.

But Winifred had a very marked self-control, and the casual observer would have seen a girl opening a letter—nothing more. Her fingers may have trembled, but not a muscle of her face told of the excitement that was making her heart beat so loudly that she herself could hear it. Perhaps the knowledge that Madame de Valois was agitated, and was watching her keenly from behind

the paper with which she was pretending to occupy herself, tended to brace her to a more complete composure than would have been possible had she been alone.

When she had taken the sheet from its envelope it was some moments before she was able to read the words that moved in confusion before her eyes. Individual words isolated themselves and stood out from the rest. She caught her own name, and by it, as it were, she tried to steady herself. When the moving letters were still, she read as follows:—

'MONKSWOOD, PRIARTON,
CORNWALL, 21*st July*.

'Your letter, Winifred, has but hastened a little the writing of one which I had long been contemplating. Let me say at once that I admit the justice of much that you have said to me, though I have not been entirely a free agent in ruling the circumstances that have kept us apart. I was greatly pained (though very little thinking told me that I could not be surprised) that the conjecture which you ask me to refute or confirm should have presented itself to you as a possible explanation of the position in which you have found yourself. Set your mind at rest upon this point at once.

You were born in wedlock. It ought to have occurred to me that some such hypothesis would naturally come to the minds of those who were interested in you, as the result of, and to account for, your prolonged separation from myself. I think, had I given the subject (in this light) a thought, I should have believed that your youth would save you from the pain of such a surmise. I am glad that you stated the question plainly. I cannot adequately express the regret that I feel in the knowledge that you should, even for a time, have laboured under the shame of such a supposition. I ask you with deep contrition to forgive me the consequence, which I see now it was inevitable that my silence should entail. My dear Winifred, what explanation shall I offer you for your long exile? Your mother's death, nearly fifteen years ago, was a blow to me which I never recovered. It changed me, I think, from a man to a stone. We had not been married four years when my dear wife was taken from me. In losing her I lost everything. I was alone. It would be futile for me to try to tell you of the desolation that possessed me. Your mother, Winifred, was, I firmly think, the purest and holiest and best woman that ever walked in this lower world. Her soul was spotless. I never heard from her

lips an unkind or a thoughtless word. It was a privilege to be her friend, and—think of it—I was her husband. The happiness that for these short years I knew was a happiness that falls, I should suppose, to the lot of few. Think, to have been the companion of such a woman; to have lived beside her beautiful life; and to have had her love. God gave me this, and in an hour took it away. Your mother died by a sudden and a painful death. She bore her anguish with fortitude and resignation. I tell you this now, Winifred, because I wish that it shall never again be spoken of between us. I would have died ten deaths to save her, but human aid availed, and could avail, nothing. She left me. I hated life. I hated my fellow creatures. I left the world in which I had lived, and travelled for seven years. Then there came to me a longing for England, and I came back and took Monkswood, where I have lived since. By my own wish I have given up all my friends, and they have lost sight of me. I lead a solitary life with books. I have no near neighbours, and I fear that for you the dulness of Monkswood would be intolerable. If you think that you could bear it, come to me. I should like to see you. It will be hard for you to believe that this is true after years of apparent

neglect. My excuse is that I have shrunk from seeing anyone who could remind me of the past. But for the last twelve months you have been very constantly in my thoughts, and, as I said at the beginning of these lines, I was contemplating writing to you. Do not hate me, Winifred. Write to me and tell me when you will come to me—the sooner the better. I am willing to make any arrangement that shall be for your happiness. I am not rich, but my income is much greater than my needs require, and I can give you a good allowance. You shall do exactly as you like about living here with me, or engaging a suitable companion and travelling or settling anywhere that may please you.

'Pray thank Madame de Valois on my behalf for her kindness to you. I shall be writing to her myself in a day or two. I wish you, Winifred, to be free to come here now, or later, as may seem best to you.—Your father,

'ALFRED MOUNT.

'*P.S.*—Shall I add that I am glad that you did not mitigate what you spoke of as the antagonism of your letter? It has helped me to know you. I hope, my daughter, that the day is not far off when we shall know each other better.'

Winifred read her father's letter in silence, and, when she had mastered its contents, she handed it to Madame de Valois.

'You wish me to read it?'

'Certainly, madame.'

Not till Winifred spoke did she know how deeply she was affected. The huskiness of her tone sounded strange even in her own ears, and Madame de Valois, unable to gather anything from Winifred's face, noted the sign of her emotion, and took the letter with trembling hands.

'I fear you have not good news,' she said, with a nervous smile.

'Read,' said Winifred shortly.

But madame's spectacles were dim, and she had to take them off and rub them before she could see properly.

Winifred made a pretence of eating her breakfast.

'Thank God!' said madame below her breath and Winifred knew that the good woman had reached that part of the letter which set her gravest fears at rest. Never did reading seem so slowly done. Minutes elapsed between the turning of the pages, and Winifred was chafing to have her father's letter once more in her own hands. Thoughts, fugitive as those of the vaguest

dream, passed through her mind as she waited. One of the canaries in the cage that hung in the window was splashing in his bath, and the drops were flung here and there by his yellow wings. They glistened as they fell through the sunlight, and reminded Winifred of the points of glass that she had seen sparkling in the soil of the beds in the garden at that moment of climax of rebellion that had expressed itself in the letter to her father. Her father then was unknown as God is unknown. Now all was different. She stood no longer alone. She pictured the fifteen years of his solitude. His isolation had been greater than her own. She saw a grey-haired man and a reading-lamp. He spoke in his letter of books. The reading-lamp seemed to complete a picture, and she was sure about the grey hairs.

When at length Madame de Valois looked up Winifred was smiling.

CHAPTER IV

'WHAT will you do, Winifred?' said Madame de Valois.

'I shall go home, madame.'

Winifred spoke with her usual decision. There was a pause after that. Madame de Valois drank her coffee, and tried to eat. The canary had finished his bath, and the water which had sparkled in its descent lay scattered on the polished boards of the floor.

'I shall go home,' said Winifred again. 'It is what I have wished. I must see my father, and know him. After that, I can arrange a life for myself. But I think I shall like'—she stopped and changed her word—'shall love my father.'

She looked again at the letter she held.

When she could make her escape, she went up to her room and locked the door. She sat down beside the window, and spread the letter upon the sill. She studied it almost word by word, trying to realise something of the feelings of the writer. She wondered whether the beginning had pre-

sented as great a difficulty to him as to her in the case of the letter to which this was an answer. The relief which she experienced in knowing that her birth was lawful surprised her somewhat. She had not been conscious of the anxiety which the doubtfulness of this point had occasioned her. She had truly thought that, had she discovered that she was not born of marriage, she would have been strong enough to refuse to recognise a brand of shame. It was still possible (however plainly her relief might show her that she was not indifferent to convention) that her strength would not have failed her had she been called upon to face the fact of a confirmation of the suspicion that had come to her, and that now was at rest for ever. But her relief took the form almost of exultation. She could just then have sung songs of triumph, as the women of old sung them in moments of special elation. She was not condemned to eternal enmity with her fellow-men. She had thought that her hand would be against every man, and every man's hand against her. The world, perhaps, would not prove such a battlefield as she had expected, or, at least, she would start fairly in the fight.

The plea for forgiveness that her father made touched her deeply.

From this sentence she went on to the next, which spoke of her mother. She had read this almost dispassionately at first, barely comprehending its import in her excitement. She had no mother, and her thoughts in reading the letter had been of the living and not of the dead. Now the sadness that underlay the words smote her. A sudden revelation of the beauty of the life so abruptly cut short was vouchsafed to her, and her eyes filled with tears.

'Poor father,' she said to herself. 'Poor father.' She kissed the open sheet. When she had put it away, she began to make preparations for her journey.

There seemed to be no reasonable occasion for delaying her departure, and Winifred arranged to go to England early in the following week. She telegraphed her decision that morning to Monkswood.

The next few days passed very quickly. Winifred tried in vain to realise them. She knew that since they marked the close of a period of her life she would look back upon them with a certain regret. The years that had passed so monotonously at Choseville had, after all, not been unhappy. It might be in store for her that, if on her deathbed she were permitted to review her whole life,

she would see that her childhood had been its happiest time. Who could tell? The end of it was at hand. Notwithstanding the knowledge that these last days ought to be accounted very precious, they slipped by almost unheeded. The final evening came.

Madame de Valois sat with her in the garden. The talk was intermittent. The silences that fell were filled by each in her own way.

What an evening it was. The sun had sunk in a west made splendid by gold and red. The sky was long stained with gorgeous colours. Through the trees you could see masses of glowing cloud, that looked like the slowly cooling ruins of some burnt city.

So long as the effects lasted, they formed a topic for safe comment. Later, when the brightness vanished, and the blue of night asserted itself in the summer sky, and the stars twinkled out to stud it with points of light, the silences that fell upon the two beings whom the morrow was to part, became more frequent. A vague melancholy seemed to breathe in the clear air. The leaves were only softly stirred by a breeze that was lingering rather than wanton.

Winifred could see the swing in the gathering darkness. It was one of her earliest recollections.

Should she ever see it any more, or the tall French poplars, solemn and straight as obelisks set up against the sky? She had played in this garden all her life. It was dear to her even while she had been rebelling against the limits of it. She had longed to spread her wings and to fly beyond the furthest point that her eyes could see. She had beaten herself against the bars of her prison house. Now she had her wish—she was free. Was she glad?

'The gain of one,' said Madame de Valois, 'the loss of another. That is life. But what shall I do without you, Winifred?'

She smiled as she spoke, with tears in her eyes. Her face was in shadow, so that Winifred could not see her smile, but she felt it, and the tears as well.

'It is not for ever,' she said quickly. 'I shall come back. It is I that shall miss you. This is my home.'

Madame shook her head.

'It is right for you to go. I think I did not know how dear you were to me, that is all.'

Winifred rose and knelt beside her. A profound pity stirred in her for the lonely woman she was going to leave behind.

Madame de Valois was crying.

'You have been with me so long. . . . You took the place in my heart of Eulalie, who died. I have been cross to you sometimes, but never in my heart, Winifred—never in my heart. I have loved you as I loved my Eulalie. I am a schoolmistress. It was my duty sometimes to be cross, and grim and severe, but I loved you. Oh, my dear, my dear.'

Winifred's young arms pressed closely round her. She laid her smooth young cheek against the withered hands. Her own tears were falling.

'I am not ungrateful,' she said brokenly. 'I have loved you too. No one shall take your place. You have never been cross—never—never—and I have been horrid often. I am horrid. I think only of myself. Oh, I will come back. I shall always look upon this as my home. I don't want to leave you. . . .'

'My dear, it is right and natural that you should go. There. See, I am all right again. I shall look for your letters. They will console me. I shall hope to hear of your success in the world, and your happiness always. I am sure that your father is a good man, and that you will love him. Now, no tears more. I am a stupid old woman. A life without parting would be incomplete.'

The night grew chilly. Madame de Valois

shivered, and said that she would go into the house. Winifred accompanied her to the door. Jessamine grew round it. Winifred never forgot the scent that hung in the air.

'I will follow you presently,' she said.

'Take care you catch not a cold,' said madame.

Winifred turned back into the garden. The moon now was visible behind the cathedral. A splash of silver lay upon one side of the dome. The sky was wondrously high and clear. There were blackest shadows under the trees. A moth sometimes flapped into the darkness or out of it.

The night was full of subtle and sweet scents. Mignonette and heliotrope and verbena gave some of them. A sweeter yet came from a sweetbriar.

Winifred's white dress trailed over the lawn. The moon got clear of the cathedral, and the splash of silver left the dome. The shadows in the garden shifted with each minute.

There was a huge red rose growing down upon a standard rose tree. It caught Winifred's attention many times as she passed it. It had blossomed upon the day of the going of Elsie and Agatha; the day that now was marked for her by the writing of her first letter to her father. Winifred had been instrumental in saving its life a few hours since, when Madame de Valois' gardener had been cutting

flowers for the house. Now Winifred paused beside it. It was royal in colour even in the moonlight. Its heart was full and rich. The outer petals curled delicately round it. Madame de Valois' voice sounded shrilly from a window,—

'Winifred! Winifred! Come in. It is late. Come in. You will catch cold, and you must rest yourself to-night for your journey to-morrow. Come in, my dear. Now, quick.'

'Very well, madame.'

The window was closed.

The sacrament of Winifred's farewell to the old garden was nearly complete. She took one last look round. She comprehended in it the swing, the trees, the flower-beds, the familiar paths. Her heart grew large and went out to them all. The rose was close to her. She made it the symbol of the whole, and placed her hands round it. She held it to her lips and pressed them deeply into its gentle petals. She stood for fully a minute thus, breathing the scent of the flowers and whispering to it her good-bye. When she turned away blindly a petal fell, then another, then fell a shower of crimson and lay like blood upon the ground. Perhaps the rose was the symbol not only of the garden, but of the life that Winifred left on the morrow for ever.

CHAPTER V

THE train ran out of Choseville station, and Winifred Mount was free.

The day of her emancipation was one of glorious weather. The flat country was painted with generous colours. Winifred sat at the window and looked out. She had been provided by Madame de Valois—to the accompaniment of a thousand directions—with a work of French fiction suited in character to her years rather than to her knowledge of life. She did not attempt to read. She held the volume affectionately for the sake of the giver, and looked at the country through which she passed. The servant with whom she travelled sat in another compartment. Winifred had insisted upon this arrangement. The matronly Natalie was of a talkative disposition, and Winifred wished to be alone.

The parting from Madame de Valois, when the moment arrived for it, had been too hurried to be keenly felt by the one who was going. The one

who was left had leisure to weep. For Winifred her acutest feelings had been touched on the previous night. The morning could not reproduce the same poignancy of emotion.

Her sensations now were far more those of excitement and hope than of depression or regret. She was free, and life was before her. Such spirits rose in her as made her eyes to glow and her face to burn. She watched with lively interest the places through which she passed, and the people that she met upon her journey. She had travelled so little. Madame de Valois moved seldom from Choseville, and, during the years of Winifred's sojourn there, an occasional visit to a neighbouring watering-place had been the extent of her wanderings. For her, then, had been reserved all the wonder and delight of a child who sees new scenes, together with the faculty of ripe appreciation to which the child cannot have attained. All things had their charm and their mystery.

Calais was reached. Natalie, all smiles and alpaca, came to the door of Winifred's compartment.

There was an hour to wait before the boat would start. Winifred, more for the sake of filling time and amusing herself than from a need of food, ordered some lunch. Her appetite came in eating.

She was handed a wine list, and chose the first claret that bore a familiar name; a half bottle more than sufficed for the needs of herself and Natalie. For the first time in her life she tasted the joys of liberty. She laughed at the Frenchwoman's description of her travelling companions, and listened with interest to her plans for the future.

Bonne d'Enfants, said Natalie; she would seek a place like that. Choseville was dull. She had enough of it, she! But it was dull! And a school! What could one in a school? A nurse, that was the thing for her—a nurse in a good family. For a maid she was too fat—look, ha, ha, ha!—but for a nurse, what matter?

The discontent had vanished from Winifred's face. She looked splendidly young and straight and fresh. All her appointments were neat and perfect of their kind. Those who saw her looked again. For a time she was unconscious that she attracted any attention. Natalie had been aware of it from the first, and felt that she shone in a reflected glory. It incited her to a stout sprightliness that struck Winifred suddenly as grotesque.

'These people stare at us,' she said coldly.

She beckoned to a waiter and paid her bill.

A man who was lunching at a table close by

rose to make way for her to pass. Winifred had noted him vaguely. She had thought that he looked a gentleman, and that he was possibly of the type of man that Agatha Twine and Elsie Luttrell had described to her as English and thoroughly unlike any that was represented at Choseville. This she had thought, barely conscious that he was present, or that her ideas concerning him had formulated themselves in her mind. It was as she passed him that she caught his eye by accident, and something in its expression told her that he had heard her words and had taken them as directed personally at himself. She flushed, hesitated for an instant, and left the dining-room. She tried to forget this incident.

She made her way to the steamer, and took her place on deck. Natalie was an uncertain sailor, and went below. Winifred opened her book, but it lay upon her lap unread, and the breeze from the Channel played with the leaves. Her mood was receptive. She saw and heard without effort, and left her mind free to receive impressions. The water in the quay was green as an emerald. Under a boat that passed it was greener still. A thousand suns were reflected and threw out dancing beams that were dazzling. Some men idled near the custom house. Their voices reached Winifred.

A woman's wooden shoes made a pleasant sound upon the stone. Presently the Paris train came in and people began to pour into the boat. The best places were quickly taken, and others were sought by less fortunate passengers with fuss or philosophy, according to individual temperament.

Winifred wondered vaguely about the people that she saw. She felt herself to be separate from them by reason of the mystery that surrounded the future to which she was going. It surprised her that she was so little nervous. She did not yet look forward with any misgiving to the meeting with her father. She had decided that she would like him. She felt no fear. Her sensations of the moment were clearly of pleasure.

People came and went upon the deck. A volume of thick smoke issued from the funnels and ascended in massive wreathings. A bell sounded. Presently the vessel was in motion. Calais receded; then the coast of France. The sea had not a wave. The moving surface of it was flat, but evenly rugged, as if it had been cut with a chisel or chipped like the flints of the stone age. It was blue in the distance, with streaks of a darker tone. The breeze was fresher as the shelter of the land became more remote. Gulls wheeled and

dipped. A broad, white trail marked the path of the steamer.

Once more Winifred became conscious that she attracted attention. This time it did not annoy her. There was no preening and acting Natalie to challenge and encourage it. Her thoughts went back to Choseville, then forward to England, thence they returned midway and paused at Calais. She wished that the man who had risen to allow her to pass had not thought that she spoke of him. She could not clearly recall his face, she did not know his colouring ; but his expression remained to her. She wondered where he was, and in what direction he was travelling.

Quite suddenly the questions answered themselves. He was sitting on deck ten or twelve yards off. Winifred started as she recognised him. His back was towards her, and she got but a side view of his face. It was a moment or two after the surprise of finding him so near to her before she realised that he could not see her from his position. Then she allowed herself to study him. He appeared to be broad and of a fair height. He was healthily sunburnt. His forehead seemed to be square and low under the cap, which he had pulled down to shade his eyes as he read. A point of his moustache projected beyond the line of his

cheek ; otherwise he was clean shaven. Winifred could see one of his ears. It was small and well placed. His hair was dry, and neither very curly nor very straight. She decided that the hand that she could see and the feet that were stretched out and crossed were well bred. All this pleased her She deeply regretted the incident in the Calais dining-room, and wished once more that she could explain.

'I didn't mean it for you,' she said under her breath; 'I didn't mean it for you. I . . . should not have minded your looking at me. You would not stare rudely. And you thought I meant what I said for you . . .'

The wind grew keener. The sunlight looked as if it was blown about. Winifred turned up the collar of her coat. Things that were loose flapped. Bits of conversation flapped too, and reached her. She fitted them into a patternless mosaic. For a time this amused her.

The jerking of the machinery was like the pulsing, she thought, of a great heart in the body of the steamer. The smoke had ceased to pour from the funnels, and they looked unoccupied. The green water rushed by with a sound that had a part in the music of the journey.

Winifred returned to a contemplation of the

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stranger to whom—so she knew that he thought—she had been rude.

He had changed his position. Now his profile was towards her, and she saw that it was cleanly cut. It pleased her to see that there was no haziness in the outline of his face. She forgot presently that she was still looking at him. It was not till afterwards, and when she found that the very colour of the cloth of his coat and his cap had stamped itself upon her memory, that she realised how close must have been her scrutiny.

He turned two or three pages, glancing cursorily at their contents, and pausing here and there at some phrase that caught his attention; then he closed his book and rose. Winifred looked away, but she knew none the less that he did not glance in her direction. Probably both she and the incident with which she was connected had long since passed from his mind. When she looked again he was lighting a cigar in the shelter of his hands. The second match accomplished his wish, and he strolled away. He was taller than she thought. Then the funnel hid him. He must have been one of the first to land for she did not see him again.

The white coast of Dover rose above the sea. Winifred saw it at undulating intervals. There

was more motion on the English coast. A few people succumbed and went hurriedly below. It seemed hardly worth while.

Winifred stood up presently to watch the rising cliffs. They were vividly white in the sunlight. They grew more distinct with every moment. The sea rose and fell like the bosom of a sleeping woman. A spar, a bit of wreckage washed by. Winifred gazed after it wondering. She turned again and faced the shore. That was England, and her exile was finished. That was England, and held her future. That was England, and England was her home. A very ecstasy of hope and joy possessed her. She could have sung. She could have laughed aloud. But she was Winifred, and it was a calm face, albeit with happy eyes, that looked ahead. The wind played round her—a salt wind that seemed to hold the essence of the sea. Her skirts were blown back and outlined her slim and straight figure. She held on her hat. The sun shone upon the loose but tidy knot of silky hair that showed below it. She stood alone for a few moments in her part of the deck.

CHAPTER VI

IT was long before Winifred's eyes closed that night. She lay broad awake in her bed at the hotel listening to the noise of London. In the adjoining dressing-room Natalie slept aloud the sleep of the complacent.

Till the first hour after midnight the roar of the streets was scarcely a decreasing thing. Up to midnight itself it seemed accumulative. It had a charm of its own. It was for Winifred the sound of the life-blood flowing in the giant heart of the world. It was as if the pulsing of the steamer had but symbolised the monstrous throbbings of its monstrous arteries and veins. She listened with awe and wonder.

This was London. She had read of it, had thought of it, had talked of it; but the subtle glamour of it, and the mystery of it, surpassed her most unrestrained imaginings. It seemed to her that already she had seen that which was most representative of her country. The green beauties of Kent as she saw them from the train filled her

with pride. The squalors of the south-east approach to the town, hideous though they were in themselves, had an interest for her. When she saw a name written up upon a factory or other building, she wondered about it. The very smoke from the countless chimneys had its part in the spell of the huge city. Acres of roofs, rapid glimpses of interiors beneath them, with a room here and there hung with washed clothes; a man in his shirt sleeves leaning out of a window; a woman shaking a child in a strip of garden; a bit of desolate ground on which men were beating carpets; a lark in a green cage on the wall of a house; railway bridges; lines crossing and recrossing, tangling, knotting; trains finding amid the maze of shining rails their own direction; a rope walk, gasworks, a plumed hearse in a narrow street, and streets and streets and streets; the river, steamers, and London Bridge: these are a few of the things that passed before Winifred's wide eyes that night. Faces, too, that she had seen on her journey, or in the coffee-room where she and Natalie had eaten their dinner before going out together to explore, passed before her. For Winifred had chosen a thick veil, and with the Frenchwoman sallied forth from the hotel. She had no plan She called a hansom, and with difficulty

managed to make the driver understand that he should lose nothing by engaging himself to her by the hour. He was stupid. Where was he to drive? Winifred knew by name a few of the principal streets. She gave them. He said Tower Hill was not very near Park Lane.

But in the end he displayed a fair intelligence in the route that he took. Once he had grasped the situation, he became elaborately communicative through the trap, in a guide-book vein. The Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and the Aquarium were pointed out with impartiality. The stores in Victoria Street, and something behind a wall and called Constitootion 'Ill shared the same distinction. Winifred gathered vaguely that the last had something to do with cabinet ministers. A little further on was the 'Orspital and 'Ideparkorner.

''Ideparkorner?' said Winifred upwards. 'Oh, to be sure, Hyde Park. Can't we drive through it?'

'All in good time, miss; you leave it to me.'

He turned into Knightsbridge and pursued his course past the barracks. He entered the Park at Princes' Gate. The long summer twilight was scarcely waning yet. The west was yellow behind the trees. Other distances were mistily blue. The

length and straightness of the Row in the passing glimpse of it called from Winifred an exclamation of wonder and delight.

'London holds the country,' she said to Natalie.

The leaves of the elms looked light and feathery. A great building with points and pinnacles rose above them, and looked in the evening like the palace of a king. There were rich browns in the earth of the ride.

From the bridge the Serpentine looked like a river. The water was dyed with colours from the west. Some ducks were flying with big wings and outstretched necks from one end of it to the other.

'The Thames,' said Winifred to Natalie, with all the certainty of conviction. '*La Tamise.*'

A chuckling through the open trap overhead told her that she was mistaken.

'Isn't it the Thames?' she asked, smiling.

'Not exactly, miss, and it's well I 'eard you, for some people might have laughed if you was to went abaht saying as the Thames ran through 'Yde Park. No, that's the Serpentine; that's what that's. It's a artificial lyke. If you want to know anything, just you arst me. Yor shor to myke a mistyke if you go tryin' to guess what things are. I'm a Londoner born and bred, I am.

So don't 'esityte to arst me. That's the magazine as yor looking at now—where the pahder's kep.'

With so well-informed a guide it is conceivable that Winifred contrived to see not an inconsiderable portion of London in the two hours during which he was her pilot. She sought Elsie Luttrell's home in Park Lane, and discovered it. A brougham was at the door, and by a curious chance at the moment of the approach of the hansom, in one of two ladies who emerged from the house, Winifred recognised her friend.

'Oh, I must stop. I must speak to Elsie,' she cried.

Miss Luttrell caught sight of the waving Winifred.

'Of all people in the world,' she cried, with unfeigned delight. 'What brings you here? How did you leave Choseville? Have you run away? Why, I declare, Fat Natalie is with you. You can't have run away; at least, not very fast. *Ça va bien* Natalie? My darling Winifred, I'm so glad to see you. Mother, mother, this is Miss Mount, Winifred Mount. You have often heard of her.'

Mrs Luttrell leant forward out of the brougham. She was a pretty woman, with fair hair, and what seemed to Winifred to be a very low dress under the cloak which the warmth of the night made it

unnecessary to fasten. Her voice won Winifred at once.

'Indeed I have heard of you, Miss Mount,' she said, putting out her hand. 'Elsie talks of no one else. I am very glad to see you. Are you staying in town? Can you lunch with us to-morrow?'

Winifred explained that she was going down to Monkswood in the morning.

'Monkswood?'

'My home, Elsie. I am going home.'

Miss Luttrell looked at her for a few moments in silence. Winifred saw that the few days that had elapsed since she had parted with her friend at Choseville had made a wonderful change in her appearance. Her hair was done differently, and she had a grown-up air that struck Winifred as enchanting. It sat upon the school-girl so daintily. Elsie felt rather than noted the change in Winifred herself.

'Oh, Winifred, I'm so glad.'

'Elsie, we shall be late,' said Mrs Luttrell. 'We are going to the play, Miss Mount. You will forgive us for hurrying on.'

'Couldn't you come with us? The Twines are in town. We are going to meet them at the theatre — Agatha and her cousin, Percy Twine.'

The name struck Winifred. She had heard it before several times.

'I am not dressed, and I haven't a seat,' she said.

'How am I to see you? I want to hear everything. Have you turned out a princess? Are you restored to your kingdom? Is your kingdom restored to you?'

Miss Luttrell's foot was on the step of the brougham. A servant stood respectfully at the door waiting to close it.

'I will write to you, Elsie.'

'You will come and stay with me.'

'Yes, you must come and stay with us, Miss Mount. Now, Elsie, dear, it is nearly nine o'clock already.'

'All right, mother. I must kiss Winifred again. Good-bye, Winifred. Write to me directly you get home. Good-bye.'

The carriage rolled away. Winifred went back to her hansom. The glimpse of Elsie and her smart young mother had all the charm of the pleasures that come to us unexpectedly. Natalie chattered. Winifred did not listen. As he turned out of Hamilton Place into Piccadilly, the cabman began once more to point out and to explain. But after the meeting with Elsie, Winifred found that her attention wandered and that her impres-

sions were less clear. Her thoughts followed her friend to the theatre.

So Winifred lay awake that night. Her brain appeared to work automatically. In a series of dissolving views all that she had seen passed before her; and behind and through it all was the distant turmoil of London. When this ceased with the small hours of the morning, she was still disinclined to sleep. She was not restless. She was not even tired. Her thinking seemed to be done for her without effort of her own. She heard the increasing hours strike. Through the curtains she saw the light of dawn creeping. It was some time after this that, all unconsciously, she sank from alert wakefulness to dreamless slumber.

She woke while the day was still young, and found, to her surprise, that she was nervous. It was the reaction after the self-possession and passive expectation of the day before. She ate little breakfast. The coming meeting with her father occupied her thoughts. She dreaded it, and looked forward to it. Natalie told her that she was pale.

It was with an effort that she fixed her mind upon such small things of the moment as required her attention. She paid her bill, and left the hotel long before it was necessary. She was possessed

by restlessness. The cab would never reach the station. The train would never start. She paced the platform, and bought books and papers. An excursion or a school treat or something that was horrid filled the station. Hot teachers marshalled noisy children. A youth played a screeching concertina. Winifred recognised Elsie's Song of Sorts. Nothing was picturesque. A shiny woman had untied her bonnet strings. A rush was made for a train. It swept the platform of its unsightly crowd.

When at length the time was come, Winifred parted from Natalie, and went her unknown way.

The hours passed she knew not how. She left the carriage once, and lunched hurriedly at a station where a halt was made. She read. She thought. She thought. She thought. She reviewed her past life. She made conjectures as to the life that was before her. She looked at her fellow-passengers, and remembered nothing of them. She looked at the country through which she passed. She slept a little; but even then her brain did not rest. The day moved towards evening, and still Winifred travelled. The sun was about to set. Shadows fell and lengthened. The country became bolder, rougher and more beautiful.

'We must be nearly there,' she said to herself. 'We' meant herself and the train, for she was

alone in her compartment. But when Priarton was reached, she read the name with a start. Her knees trembled as she rose to her feet. For a moment she wished herself back at Choseville.

It was a little country station. She was the only person who alighted, and a servant approached her, touching his hat.

'Are you from Monkswood?' she asked him. Her voice had not its normal clearness.

'Yes, 'm. The trap is outside The cart will bring your luggage. Mr Mount told me to say he was sorry not to be able to meet you himself. He isn't very well, 'm.'

Winifred said that she was sorry for that, and, after identifying her trunks, followed him through the gate to the road, where a boy held a smart cob.

A sense of strangeness and aloofness possessed her. It scarcely seemed that it was she herself who was flying behind the trotting mare through a new and beautiful country. The groom pointed out with his whip one or two objects, she knew not what, of local interest.

'My father is not ill—seriously?' she said suddenly.

'No, 'm, but he is never very strong. He hasn't been himself for some days.'

After that there was silence, and then the sea came in sight.

'Oh, the sea,' said Winifred. 'Monkswood is near the sea?'

'A hundred yards off, or so, 'm. The house stands in a bay.'

Ten minutes later the groom said,—

'We're in Monkswood now, 'm. That's the house above the trees. Steady, lady!'

A white rabbit crossed the road, and the mare shied.

'Steady, lady,' Winifred repeated to herself, with a smile, but she was not trembling because the mare had shied.

CHAPTER VII

WINIFRED alighted mechanically.

'If you wouldn't mind pulling the bell, 'm ; she won't stand.'

The handle was stiff; it was evidently little used. The bell itself rang harshly, so close at hand as to be startling.

The house was of red stone, and there were lattice windows. Ivy and creepers covered the porch. So much Winifred noted before footsteps sounded within, and the door was opened by a man in a striped linen coat.

Winifred entered boldly. Nervousness was abnormal with her, and she would conquer it. The hall was lined with black oak, and the stairs that came down into it were worn at the middle of each step.

A door opened, and Winifred knew that a moment would bring her face to face with her

father. She turned in the direction of the sound. He took both her hands and led her into the room whence he came.

'So you are Winifred?' he said.

'I am Winifred.'

'Will you kiss me, Winifred?'

She did so. Then he put his hands, one on each side of her face, and he pressed his lips to her forehead.

She had expected to see an old man. He was comparatively young—forty-five, perhaps, at the outside. He was tall. He was slender and well-knit. His hair and his moustache were hardly grey. His eyes were so light that Winifred could see the clear tracing of the iris. His nose was fine and delicate.

He sat down and drew his daughter towards him. She felt no fear now, nor any embarrassment.

'I meant to meet you, Winifred, but I was ill. I am not able for anything just now.'

'The groom told me. I will nurse you back to health—father.'

She put her hand upon his shoulder. He took it in his own and held it to his lips.

'Dear child!' he said.

The words were spoken against her hand.

He asked her some questions about her journey, and she gave him a brief account of it.

'We will have supper together,' he said then. 'Come, I will show you your room.'

The window of it gave upon the sea. There was a bowl of roses on the dressing-table, and the fragrance of them was in the air. There were blue walls and blue curtains. The colour suggested the sea in one of its moods. The roses were reminiscent of Choseville. Some books lay on a table.

A maid-servant came in to see if she could be of use. Winifred asked about her luggage. It had not yet come.

'Then I will give you my keys,' she said. 'You can unpack the smaller trunk when it arrives. The other need not be opened yet. No, cold water, please.'

She bathed her face. The water, even in the twilight, took a bluish tint from the walls. It was clear, and very cold. She descended to the hall, refreshed and with glowing eyes and cheeks. She had re-twisted her hair, and it shone as she passed a tall lamp that had been lit, and that stood at the foot of the stairs. She looked an embodiment of youth and litheness as she came down the worn oak steps. They were slippery with age and beeswax.

Mr Mount was standing at the window in the dining-room, It was a huge room, in which the white table looked like a little island.

'You must want your supper, Winifred. Aren't you hungry? Come and look at the view till it is ready.'

She crossed the room and stood beside her father.

'Your photograph did not do you justice.'

'I am glad you think that.'

'It robbed your hair of its colour. It made you look dark. You are fair. You were very fair as a baby, Winifred.'

'Was I? I know nothing of that part of my life.'

He turned the conversation abruptly. Later Winifred found that he had a habit of doing this. It amounted to a trick. Later still, she found that it was when a certain period of his life and of her own was approached. Often it was he himself who introduced the topic, which ultimately and suddenly he banished. At such moments something which she expressed to herself as 'impenetrable' was in his face. It was baffling as the smile of the sceptic; but it was not a smile, and it held off straight questions.

'I hope you like the sea, Winifred. I spend my days watching it. Do you paint?'

She shook her head.

The servant in the linen coat—still in the linen coat—announced that supper was ready.

The meal was simple in appearance, elaborate, probably, in the care of its preparation.

'But I like pictures,' she said, continuing the conversation where it was broken off; 'and I think I have appreciation.'

'You should have it,' he said, 'if there is anything in heredity.'

He did not say just then whether the inheritance should be from himself or her mother.

He passed his hand suddenly across his forehead. Winifred thought that he held his breath for a moment.

'You must carve off the table, Dalton.'

'Yes, sir.'

Winifred was looking at her father.

'Don't mind me, dear. I shall be all right in a moment. It is — stupid to be so — good for nothing.'

He poured from a small decanter which stood near him a little brandy into a wine glass. His hand shook.

'I had fever in Egypt some years ago. I have never been right since. This man nursed me through it, or I should have died there and then.'

Winifred looked over in the direction of Dalton

who was carving at a side-table. She liked his face. She looked back from him to Mr Mount. Her father's voice was stronger when next he spoke.

'There, I am all right now. Don't look so concerned about me. Tell Miss Mount that we are used to these attacks, Dalton.'

'Yes, sir.'

'We must make a butler of him now that you have come, Winifred. That striped coat must be given up, Dalton.'

'Yes, sir. Chicken, sir?'

'You must alter nothing for me, father.'

She smiled as she spoke. She met Dalton's respectful eyes with the smile on her lips, and she won his faithful heart.

'What will you drink, Winifred? There is burgundy and claret.'

Winifred did not know the difference, but she said claret.

Mr Mount talked easily and lightly of a thousand things, but he looked more ill than when his daughter first arrived. His face was thinner than she had thought, his hands longer and more nervous.

The night closed in. The lamps threw a warm light over the table. A few things were still visible in the dusk outside the big windows. The room

itself was obscure in the corners. There were pictures on the walls, but Winifred could not see their subjects. There were roses on the table in flat bowls. A heavy curtain hung over a door.

'My study,' said Mr Mount. 'To-morrow I will show you the house. It isn't as big as it looks. This room is somewhat out of proportion to the rest of the building. There isn't a drawing-room —or, to speak more accurately, I haven't made one, for I have had no use for it. You shall do as you like. You must choose a room for a boudoir or whatever you may call it for yourself. I am going to leave you now, Winifred. You will find the chairs in the hall very comfortable if you don't feel inclined to go up just yet. Please ask for anything you want. There are plenty of books in the house, and, dear, you must read at your own risk. I should not know how to choose your books for you. Everything is lying about. Good-night, dear. Sleep well. I am afraid I shall not breakfast with you. Order it when you like. Will you have it in your room?'

'I would rather come down.'

'Well, you only have to tell Dalton. By the way, you haven't a maid.'

'No, father.'

'You shall get one. In the meantime, Elizabeth will attend to you. Good-night, dear.'

'Good-night. . . .'

There was a pause. Winifred did not move away.

'Father.'

'Yes.'

'I am so glad to know you.'

'My dear, we ought to have known each other long ago. You must forgive me for this.'

'I think I have wanted to know you all my life,' said Winifred. 'I think I have cared for you always.'

'A new life begins for us both to-day.'

Mr Mount lit his candle and went to his room. Winifred stood for a few moments at the window, and then made her way to the hall. Dalton brought another lamp and placed it on a small table beside one of the large wicker chairs. The door stood open, and Winifred went out into the porch. The night was as fair as that last night at Choseville. The same moon that had splashed the dome of the cathedral with silver, threw a wide stretch of dancing light upon the sea. She sat down upon the stone outer sill of one of the low windows of the hall, and with her head against the lattice, and her eyes upon the sea, she fell into a happy reverie.

Her father, Elsie Luttrell, Madame de Valois had a part in it—and one other. She wondered where he was, this other. Perhaps some day she would meet him—everything that was unlikely happened in life!—and then she would tell him that she had not the intention he supposed. . . .

The wind that played round her was soft and gentle. It barely even whispered to the leaves. There was the recurring sound of long waves that broke peacefully upon the shore.

She sat still for half an hour, thinking, watching, and became sleepy. Then she went into the house. Dalton met her at the foot of the stairs with a request for her orders for the morning. She gave them, choosing nine o'clock as the hour at which she would breakfast. He lit her candle for her, wished her a respectful good-night, and disappeared as she ascended the stairs.

She slept the night through, and woke refreshed and happy when she was called. She dressed leisurely spending much of her time at her open window, and then went down to breakfast.

The dining-room looked even larger by day, and the table more than ever like a white island. The pictures caught her attention, and she sought amongst them for one which might be a portrait of her mother. But she did not find what she sought.

She asked Dalton about her father's movements. They were uncertain. Was he better? Yes, he was better, but Dalton was making him keep very quiet. Anyway his master would be down to lunch; that would be at one. Would Miss Mount care to drive? The trap could be at the door in a few minutes. Winifred shook her head. She would not be at a loss to employ her morning. She learnt the hour of the departure of letters for the post and wrote fully to Madame de Valois. To Elsie she promised herself she would write on the following day. She was in the garden when her father joined her. She saw him coming towards her with a pleasure that was in part curiosity. He was as young as she had supposed on the preceding evening. He kissed her and answered her questions as to his health.

'Shall we go over the house?'

'Are you well enough?'

'Oh, yes. Come.'

She walked beside him. The hall and the dining-room Winifred knew. The drawing-room was well-shaped, and more or less empty as she had expected.

'We must see about furnishing it,' Mr Mount said.

The bedrooms were good and many, but naturally interested Winifred but little. Her eyes

scanned the walls. She sought a portrait always, and did not find it.

On the first floor, and near her own room, Mr Mount opened a door and led her into a corner room, giving on one side on to the sea, and on the other on to the garden and the country beyond. The views on each hand were so wide in their range, and so fine of their kind, that Winifred gave an exclamation of delight.

'This is the room which I thought that you would probably choose for yourself,' Mr Mount said. 'If you like another better you can have it. I had a piano put in here on the chance of your choosing this one.'

'I sha'n't see anything I like better,' said Winifred.

'You must alter what you like—change the furniture or get other furniture.'

There were many water-colours in the room, some hung, some standing in their frames against chairs or the wall. Winifred examined one of them. She had learnt little of art at Choseville, but her instinct was selective.

'Oh!' she said, with a long-drawn breath.

Her father was watching her closely when she looked up and met his eyes.

She went from one to another of the pictures.

'Yours?' she said.

He shook his head.

'I could do nothing as beautiful as those.'

'My mother's.'

'Your mother's, Winifred.'

Silence fell between them after that. Winifred knew that the subject was closed. When Mr Mount spoke again it was merely of the room.

'You think that you will like it? Very well, get Dalton to move the furniture for you as you wish. You may want shelves or things put up. I want you to do as you like. You need never ask me about anything.'

'Very well, father.'

She half wished at that moment that her freedom were less complete. It was as if independence was for ever to be her portion, and she was hoping to attach herself to her father. She wished to draw very near to him. She thought that his manner was less cordial than on the preceding night.

A few words of kindness presently dispelled this fancy.

'This is to be your unassailable domain, dear. I shall only come into it by invitation. But I shall want to be asked very often.'

Winifred made some laughing rejoinder. She was reassured in a moment.

The lattice windows had deep sills with cushions.

She went over to that part of the window which gave on to the sea, and sat down. The waters were spread before her. While her eyes were turned away from him her father contemplated her. But she knew that he was looking at her. She was conscious herself of taking every available opportunity to study him. He was standing with his hands in his pockets, leaning against the piano. Something boyish in the attitude made him appear more than ever young to Winifred when she turned from the window.

'I am delighted with the room,' she said. 'The window seats are enchanting. I like this one best. I could never be tired of the sea. No—I like that one with the trees and the hill, and the sky far away behind it. I don't know which I like best. And I have them both. How good to have them both.'

'You will like one best one day, the other the next. There is a view to suit two moods, Winifred.'

He was smiling.

'Have you moods, too, father?'

He was laughing. His teeth, as they were shown, were young and white as her own.

'You thought moods a feminine privilege, didn't you? Yes, Winifred, I have moods, too, and I am

oftenest in that to which a sight of the sea is the one thing grateful.'

'I think that means that you are restless.'

'Perhaps so.'

He did not explain. They left the room and went down to the hall together. So much as Winifred had as yet seen had little about it which she could identify as the marks of the individuality of the owner. Mr Mount led the way to the study. It was with a strange sense of expectation that Winifred crossed the threshold.

The room was shaped like that which she had just chosen for her own. It lay, indeed, immediately below, and commanded the same prospects from a different level. But this was not what Winifred noted first. A portrait hung over the fireplace, and she knew by intuition that she had found that which she was seeking. She did not immediately approach it. Some commonplaces were spoken first. It seemed to Winifred that a long time elapsed before she stood opposite the picture. Her eyes were attracted to it as points of steel to a magnet, and she was conscious only of its presence in the room, while she listened to her father who was saying something, she knew not what, about the bookcases and the writing-table. He saw the direction of her eyes. He crossed to

the hearth, and stood before the picture. She followed him. He watched her as she studied it. Her first sensation was one of disappointment. The face was not beautiful. It was not even pretty, she thought, and at this period of Winifred's life she demanded beauty from everyone. It appeared to be very pale, and she demanded colour.

She stood for a long time before it. Her father was looking at her still, when at length she turned away from it. There was something questioning in his expression. It puzzled her.

CHAPTER VIII

BUT the picture of her mother haunted Winifred Mount.

She thought of it all that afternoon as she wandered about the rocks on the shore. The impression it had made upon her was deep and clear. She longed to see the face again. She felt as one who had wasted an opportunity. The eyes of the portrait followed her. She had not at the time been conscious of thinking them notable. But she could not forget them. They were long eyes with curved lids. She remembered the curves of the eyelids. And she wished to see them again.

The expression upon her father's face possibly contributed to make her think of the subject which was apparently answerable for it. It also followed her through the day. She felt that, standing before the picture, he had been trying some experiment. That had then been happening to which she had not the key. Inevitably she was thrown back upon

a contemplation of her years of exile. Speculation began for her anew.

The afternoon and evening passed uneventfully. At a quarter to eight Winifred and her father dined together, after which they sat in the hall whither Dalton (in the striped coat by Winifred's request) brought coffee.

'You don't mind my smoking, Winifred?'

Winifred shook her head. She was glad that he did not wish to leave her.

'Do you sing?' he said abruptly.

How strangely little he knew of her. The thought struck them both as he asked the question,

'No, but I play a little bit—like a school-girl. Shall I play?'

There was a cottage piano in the hall.

She had not underrated her powers. They were average—or, so, at least, Mr Mount judged them to be from the example she gave of them. He told her so.

'You could do better than that,' he said, laughing.

'It was rather bad,' she said, laughing too. 'But I can do better—or I could. I played better a month ago—a fortnight ago. I can't play when I am happy; it doesn't seem necessary.'

'You are happier than you were a fortnight ago?'

'I am very happy, father.'

He was standing behind her, and she leant back for a moment and rested her shining head against him.

She had something to ask him, and she told him so.

'Say on, dear.'

'When you gave me my room to-day, you said it was to be my—what was your word?—unapproachable? unassailable? domain, and that you would only come there when I invited you.'

'Well!'

'May I go into the study when I like? You won't find that I shall be running in and out all day; but sometimes. . . .'

'Whenever you like.'

She turned again to the piano. She was sure that her father knew the reason of her wish for this permission, and she wondered again why one subject should be closed between them. She had a strange conviction, too, that it was not inclination which sealed his lips. What then? When ten o'clock struck he wished her good-night, and left her. She played on for a few moments, and then rose with the deliberation that marked all her purposes and made her way across the hall to the study. The room was in darkness, and she returned for a candle. She lit it and retraced her

steps. She held the light aloft as she crossed the room. She wore a rigorously plain black dress. It trailed along the carpet after her. There was something that was ghostlike in her movement. Her face and her hair were illumined. Still holding the candle above her head, she stood once more before the picture of her mother. The pale face looked even paler by night, and appeared to stand out from its sombre background. Winifred stood perfectly still. She did not know how long she had been gazing at the portrait before the beauty of her mother was revealed to her. Once she had seen it, it seemed incredible that a few hours ago it should have escaped her. She marvelled at the disappointment which had then been hers. Her soul yearned towards the dead woman, the counterfeit presentment of whom had the power to move her so strangely

'Mother,' she said below her breath. 'Mother.'

To her fancy the lips almost smiled. She drew nearer.

The waves were breaking gently on the shore in the summer night. Winifred became conscious of the sound. The presence of the sea proclaimed itself softly all day long. It was here in the silence of the evening and the empty room that the music of it made itself felt. The candle flickered, then

steadied its light; a gust of air had blown in at the door. When Winifred turned she was not alone.

Mr Mount looked for a moment at the tall, straight figure holding the light aloft. In turning she had twisted the short train of her dress round her, and she looked taller and slimmer than in fact she was. There was a suggestion of tragedy in her attitude.

'I knew you would be here,' he said.

He came across as he spoke, and stood beside her. He watched her again as her eyes returned to the portrait. Presently his own followed the direction of hers. Then there was a long silence. It was as if they were standing by a dead body.

'She was beautiful,' Winifred said, in a low voice, at last; 'beautiful. To-day I did not think so. That was why I wanted to come again and see.'

Mr Mount did not make a rejoinder at once. Winifred felt rather than saw that his eyes were misty.

Yes, she was beautiful,' he said, after a few moments. 'In my sight, most beautiful. Her life was beautiful, too. Her life . . .'

Did her father's face become hard at this moment? She looked at him as he spoke. She thought his mouth was grim.

What was her name?'

'Winifred.'

The answer was short. Yet, what more was there to say? She felt vaguely chilled.

'Winifred,' she repeated, for something to say; 'Winifred, like mine.'

He did not answer. She became suddenly conscious that the arm which was holding the candle was aching. The light dropped from the picture as she lowered her hand. The shadows upon her own face and that of her father were thrown upwards. The room looked black and gloomy as she glanced round. A lamp which had not been lighted stood gauntly near the writing-table.

She wondered what he was thinking at that moment. It became of a sudden a strange thought that he was gazing, perhaps, with his mind's eye upon scenes and people that she knew not. He was looking at her black dress absently, and she knew that he did not see it. His visions were of that past in which it seemed she had no part.

She took a few steps towards the door, and, seeing that he did not move, she paused, expecting him to speak. She could not leave him alone in the dark. The silence lasted perhaps but a

few moments. But it seemed very long. The sound of the sea was louder than it had been when she was alone. She noted trivial things — the pattern of the Turkey carpet, and its softness and thickness; the sheen of her candle upon the glossy leather that covered the chairs.

'Shall I leave you a light?'

She had to repeat her question. She changed the wording of it, as it is one's inclination to do in repeating.

'Will you have this candle? Shall I leave it?'

He shook his head.

'Winifred.'

'Yes, father.'

'Do you remember your mother?'

It was the first time he had of his own accord mentioned the name to her. She went back to his side.

'No, father.'

'Not at all?'

'No; I have tried to remember. I would give a great deal to remember her. I suppose it is impossible. . . .'

'You were nearly three.'

'I don't remember. I am very sorry. I only remember Choseville. My life seems to have begun there.'

'Yes, your life began there.'

Something in the mind of her father seemed to be set at rest.

'Good-night, dear, I am going up to my room.'

'Good-night, father.'

The inclination was strong upon Winifred, then and there, to ask him to talk to her of her mother. But his face wore the expression which she called impenetrable. The odd experience of the last few minutes ended abruptly and left her puzzled.

CHAPTER IX

WINIFRED let a week pass before she wrote to Elsie Luttrell. During that week she received many new impressions, and those of the first day or two were strengthened. Her father treated her with kindness and affection ; but she felt that his silence regarding all that concerned her dead mother was somehow a barrier between them.

She wrote openly to Elsie, far more openly than she would have written to Agatha Twine, though both girls knew the history of the greater part of her life.

'I wonder whether he will ever tell me,' ran part of her letter. 'And yet, tell me what? There may be nothing to tell. Does it surprise you that I want a fuller knowledge? I think there is something still to tell. I want to know why he looked at me as he did when I stood before my mother's picture. He has looked at me in the same way each time her name has been mentioned. What does he expect to find in my face? Elsie, till he

tells me I think I shall spend my life in trying to remember. I believe that it—whatever it may be—is something which it is not impossible that I should recollect, and that my father watches me to see whether any inkling of it dawns upon me. Isn't this a strange conviction to have arrived at? It is my conviction nevertheless, and my firm conviction. Sometimes I think that one day I shall remember. . . . How much he loved my mother, Elsie! I cannot put into words the look which his face wore when he stood beside me the second time before her picture and looked up at it himself. There was reverence in it, and such sorrow and such pity—it was pity, Elsie (and why pity except that she died young?)—as made my heart bleed for him. If he would only talk to me about her. I can understand his love for her. I have loved her myself since I have seen her picture. I go into the study every morning to look at it. It seems more beautiful to me every day.

'Some day you must see it, and you must know my father. I am sure he will let me have you to stay here if Mrs Luttrell will let you come. I don't think he is well enough just yet, and for the same reason I must put off my visit to you till later. Even if he were well I should not like to go away at once. I want to make up to myself, and

to him if I can, for all the years we have been separated. You did not expect to hear that my father was young—I mean forty something—and boyish even sometimes. Elsie, I love him. I wish he would tell me! You will wonder why I do not ask him, for, from all that I have told you of him, you will see that he is not formidable. Well. . . . I am not very easily prevented asking anything that I want to know, but—I cannot ask this. He prevents it in some way. He seems to know that there are things which I want to ask, and I cannot ask them. I cannot tell you how he does this, for I do not know. He just prevents me.

'Perhaps in time I shall remember. Yesterday I thought for half a moment that something from my earliest childhood was coming back to me. I was looking at the water-colours which, as I told you, are in my room. I was wondering when my mother had painted them. There are several of them (the others were easily distinguishable) which seem to have been done round one spot. I know so little of England that I cannot place the county as north, south, east or west from the characteristics which might possibly label it at once to one who is familiar with this country. It is very green and leafy; elms and oaks predominate, and there are rich grassy fields and flowered hedges. There is

no rock or sand or moor. All this may be common to twenty counties; I cannot say. This, at anyrate, is the country which my mother has transferred to her paper in the sketches I speak of, and the spot which has formed, evidently, her favourite study is the site of an old black and white house. There are views of it from many aspects, and each one is exquisite. I wish I could make you see the delicacy and the perfectness of colouring of these paintings. One or two of them are little more than sketches, but most of them are minutely finished. The subtlest effects of light and shade have been caught and are held captive here for ever. They delight me, and you know how trifling and altogether vain is the average effort in water-colour. I believe my mother to have been a great artist, though she may never have been known to the world. Perhaps, though, she was known to the world! This, at least, I can ask my father. . . .

'I have asked him. He came in at that moment to know if I would drive with him this afternoon. I am going to do so. He is better. It will be our first drive together. I got the answer to the question which I asked. My mother never sent anything to an exhibition. But nothing further was volunteered. This instances the relations that exist between us upon

this one point. Why, Elsie, why? I love him I love my dead unknown mother. Why will he not talk to me of her?

'To go back. I was examining these pictures of the house yesterday. There is one of them that takes in the porch. There is ivy on this porch, and on the side of the house. (This ivy is marvellously painted.) There is a child playing in this porch—a baby child of two or three. Elsie, I was looking at that child, and suddenly I knew that I was that child, and with this sudden knowledge I had the briefest flash of a recollection—a sight—I don't know what to call it—of a lady sitting on the lawn in front of the house and sketching. Elsie, I think that was my mother. Now I scarcely know whether this really happened to me yesterday, or whether it is all fancy. But I am not fanciful am I? I never was. I am less fanciful even than you. The vision was so fleeting, so momentary, that I could not grasp it. I *think* the lady wore a blue dress. Had my mother ever a blue dress? Did she wear it when she painted me in the porch, if, indeed, it was me. (Oh, grammar, Choseville and Madame de Valois!) Had I an instant's recollection then of an incident in my childhood? I *must* ask my father about the blue dress. But for this I shall

have to wait my opportunity. I must even ask it point blank, because it is after the first mention of my mother that the subject each time is changed. That I have looked at the picture again and again since yesterday I need not tell you. I have hoped in vain to wrest from it a repetition of the experience of yesterday. I look at the child and I question it. What do you see before you, child? Is there a lawn? Yes I know there is a lawn, because that appears in another picture. Is there a lady on the lawn? She who painted the picture must be there. Does she bend over her work as I think I saw her bend? Has she a blue dress? But the child is silent. Oh, that I could see what it—the child in the picture—sees! Some day, of course, I shall ask my father everything, and refuse to allow the subject to be changed. You know that I like to face things. But I would rather that of his own accord he would tell me. If he should say there was nothing to tell that would not satisfy me. If he should say, "There is something to tell, but I will not tell you," then I think the subject might rest between us. I could trust my father if he asked me to trust him. Some day there must come this explanation, but till then his impenetrability will ward off the shafts of my curiosity.

'Here the luncheon bell rang, and I had to break off my letter. I have not been able to resume it till this moment. It is ten o'clock, and my father has gone to his room, and I have come to mine to finish writing to you. We had our drive this afternoon. My father was lighter-hearted than I had seen him yet. He looked so young and handsome, Elsie. I felt as if it was a big brother who was driving me. We saw some beautiful scenery. The dog-cart rattled along the roads at a splendid pace, and I had my first lesson in driving. There do not appear to be any neighbours here. We only passed one house, and the people it belongs to are never there. My father chose this part of the world because it was out of the way. I meant to have asked one or two questions to-day, but I did not. I could not jeopardise his lighter mood. To-night I am very happy. I do not mind anything to-night. It does not seem as if it mattered at this moment that there should be a subject closed between us. Why should it matter—one subject; is there not every other? To-morrow, of course, I shall think differently. Blue Beard's chamber was, I know, the only room in the house into which Fatima ardently wished to go, and to-morrow I shall wish as ardently to pass the door of the room that is shut to me. To-night, I say, I

do not wish it greatly. I love my father; that is enough for me. Isn't it an extraordinary thing that so short a time should have brought such changes into my life? A month ago I was eating my heart out at Choseville. I had nothing to look forward to. Now I have all I want for the present, and I am happy. Good-night, Elsie.—Your affectionate, WINIFRED MOUNT.

'*P.S.*—I have just read this letter through before closing it. It appears to me unconsciously to have registered my states of mind very faithfully. They vary, you see, as the readings of a barometer. It is satisfactory to know—for you to know, dear friend, Elsie—that you leave me at Set Fair.'

CHAPTER X

BY arrangement with herself, then, Winifred forbore to ask any further questions about her mother. She did not even mention the blue dress. She thought that as her father grew to know her better, so would he take her more closely into his confidence. She fancied, even as she found his eyes many times fixed contemplatively upon her, that he was wondering whether the time had yet come for speaking to her without reserve. He told her something of his travels. He had been round the world more than once. He told her about his early life. She learned incidentally that she had few or no relations living but himself.

'I was an only son, and the son of an only son. That limits the circle of one's near relations pretty effectually. If I have any cousins they are very distantly connected with me.'

'Have I none either?' Winifred asked.

A conversation in the old garden at Choseville

recurred to her at this moment, and she heard Elsie saying,—

'But you must have other relations—aunts, I mean (we all have aunts), and cousins, and things of that sort.'

She smiled to herself at the recollection. She hoped to hear now whether she had any 'things of that sort.'

'I only knew the immediate members of your mother's family, and they are dead,' Mr Mount said, after a pause. 'Your uncle, her brother, did not marry. He had a serious illness at the Cape, and your grandmother went out to nurse him. He did not recover, and she died on the journey home. You have no near relations, Winifred.'

'How much we should be to each other,' she thought, but she did not say the words aloud. She felt that something was gained in the receiving of even so slight an information as that which had just been vouchsafed to her. She was sure now that, as he had begun to speak of matters that were indirectly connected with the past, he would extend the range of his communications. She did nothing to hurry matters forward.

The days passed quietly. She wrote of her happiness to Madame de Valois and to her two friends. She no longer thought of dancing-girls

or of the stage as an escape. Her restlessness seemed a long way behind her.

Now and then some little incident marked the strangeness of the relations between the girl and her father. One of these owed itself indirectly to the surpassing fairness of a day of late summer. Winifred woke very early to find the sun dancing on the sea. Birds were singing in the garden. Gulls were wheeling above the green water. The sky seemed the bluer for the whiteness of the fleecy clouds that sailed so lightly upon it.

Winifred wished to bathe.

Why not? She looked at her watch. There was more than an hour before anyone would be stirring. She clad herself hastily and lightly, and made her way down the silent stairs to the hall door. She unfastened the bolts and turned the heavy key in the great brass lock. As she was crossing the threshold she remembered the swimming bath mornings at Choseville, and certain reiterated directions of Madame de Valois. She gave a merry little laugh to herself and fetched some biscuits from the dining-room. She took them with her to the shore. She ate one and laid the others down on the rock beside her towels and her clothes. The rock was dry and warm. The water when she stepped into it was not cold.

She threw herself backwards luxuriously into the small and curling waves. They were clear as glass. She was like some water thing—a mermaid, a lorelei. The sea could not take the sheen from her hair. The sun shone upon it. It was full of light. The drops glistened upon the curved arm which she plied above her head as she swam on her side. There was no effort apparent in the strength of her swimming. She was buoyant, light, supple. She dived as a seal dives, and reappeared on the surface calm nor breathless. The sight was admirable.

At Choseville she used to be the pride of her swimming mistress, far excelling, though this good woman did not know it, the teacher herself. Winifred took as naturally to the water as a Newfoundland. She had never had any fear. Her self-reliance had merely taken this form of outward expression amongst others that we know. Her courage had been the envy of Agatha Twine and the admiration of Elsie Luttrell.

'Winifred doesn't even splutter,' Miss Luttrell once said, with enthusiasm. 'Look at Black Alice. She gets along fast enough, but she blows like a porpoise—if porpoises do blow. Winifred is as undisturbed and as much at home in the water as she is out of it. I love Winifred in the baths. If I

looked like that bathing I should go to one of those French *exposed* places where people look at you through telescopes.'

Agatha expressed her horror at Elsie's unholy avowal, and stepped timidly into the water.

'Imitate mademoiselle,' said the swimming mistress; 'do as she does.'

'Just as if we could,' thought the admiring Elsie, as she watched the free and graceful movements of her friend.

There was no one on the lonely Cornish coast to spy upon Winifred or to disturb her revels. She plunged, and dived, and floated, and turned, and swam at her pleasure, then she returned to her warm rock, where she dressed and ate her biscuits, and sat for a long time combing out her shining hair.

Two hours later her father joined her as she sat at breakfast. He was better he told her, and smiled as he said that Dalton had allowed him to get up.

'And you are going to breakfast with me, father?'

He nodded.

'How nice. I'll tell Dalton to lay a place for you. Oh, he has. I didn't see.'

She poured out a cup of coffee for him, asking his directions the while.

I haven't done this for you before, you see.'

She had some little school story about coffee, and told it neatly. The point of it lay in the reply of a new girl, who was asked if she would have *café au lait*, and who said, 'Yes, please, *café au lait* without milk.' When she looked up her father was looking at her hair. It wasn't much of a story perhaps, but he might have laughed.

'Your hair, Winifred!'

'I've been bathing, father. I left it down to dry, and I was reading when the breakfast-bell rang, and I did not stop to do it up. I would not have left it as it is if I had known you would be down.'

'My dear, I don't mean that. It is the length and the richness of it. Stand up, Winifred.'

He rose as he spoke and went over to her.

'It must be nearly a yard long,' he said.

He curled a tress of it round his finger. It was fine, soft, glossy, and very strong.

'It is exactly a yard long,' said Winifred, smiling. 'The girls used to measure it at school. There was one girl whose hair was longer than mine, but it was dark.'

She stopped.

'It was rather conceited of me to say 'but'—wasn't it?' she added as the thought struck her.

'It is full of colour and light,' he said.

He caught more of it and twisted it round his hand ; then more of it ; then all of it.

'How thick it is. It fills my hand. How it shines.'

His hand tightened upon it. Winifred trembled a little unaccountably. He let it go abruptly.

The incident was curious. It seemed to her that like the water-colour it should tell her something—that holding on by it she ought to be able to reach down into that past which held the secret of her life, if secret there were, and snatch therefrom some deep lying memory.

CHAPTER XI

NOW happened a thing that was disturbing, and that had its effect in adding to the perplexities of Winifred.

It chanced one afternoon that Mr Mount had some business which kept him to the house, and necessitated the abandonment for once of the drive which he was in the habit of taking daily with his daughter.

Thrown on her own resources, Winifred went out by herself. Air and exercise were essential to her health and her comfort. She did not wish to waste a day of the summer that was prolonging itself so generously. There were parts of Monkswood, limited as the estate was, which she had not yet explored. She walked up behind the house, through a small orchard and some meadows, to the woods themselves. When she had gained these, the sea might have been a hundred miles away so luxuriant was the verdure. A path presented itself to her, and she followed it. She had no particular

destination in view, and it was as well to take one direction as another. Where the soil was damp, ferns were growing at the roots of the trees. Winifred appreciated to the full their rich beauty without experiencing the least wish to uproot them or to rob them of their leaves. She had few school-girlish instincts. She had never pressed flowers between the leaves of her books, nor collected stamps, nor crests, nor postmarks. Agatha would have cried, 'Oh, what lovely ferns! I must take some of them home. Do help me to dig them up.' She would then have torn several from their mossy beds, and at intervals these, as she wearied of the weight of them, would have marked the course of her walk. Agatha called this a love of nature.

Rain had fallen heavily in the night, and there was a sweet, soft smell of wet earth. Winifred breathed it in luxuriously. The first tints of autumn had barely begun to show themselves in the leaves, but a fungus here and there was crimson, with white spots. Winifred pursued her way, feeling rather than noting many of the beautiful things which surrounded her. The path twisted and turned. Sometimes the great loop of a root jutted out across it. A pheasant got up near at hand and startled her. She reached the other side of the wood at length, and found herself in a road

which led to Priarton. Below it ran the river, which emptied and filled itself with the tides. A girl was paddling about in a canoe. Winifred watched her with interest. The sea must be going out; the river ran down towards the coast.

Winifred looked at her watch. It was still early she found, and she turned her face up stream and followed the road. The river narrowed after a time. Presently a stone bridge spanned it. She walked up to this and leant over the wall to look at the water. A line at some height above the surface showed high-water mark. The water swirled round the buttresses under the arch. She crossed to the other side of the bridge. There the river grew narrower still. It ran between rushy banks. A bit of sea-weed came floating down. Winifred watched it as it sped under the bridge. Then something else caught her attention: it was an empty canoe, moored together with a large open boat, fifty yards or so above the bridge, on the left and out of the current. There was a cottage near at hand. Winifred wondered whether they could be for hire. It seemed improbable, since at this distance from the town there could be no one to hire them. There could be no harm in asking at anyrate. It would be pleasant, if she

could get the canoe, to paddle down to Priarton, whence she could easily walk home.

She made her way to the cottage. A man was working the patch of tilled ground which lay behind it. A woman with a baby in her arms answered Winifred's knock. Winifred, with a pleasant smile, stated her business clearly. The woman didn't know. The canoe wasn't theirs. She would call Tom. Tom would know.

Tom came from the back of the house, carrying his spade. He was a goodly young Cornishman, with the frank eyes of his race. He didn't rightly know either. The canoe, she was not his. It was like this. A young gentleman had paddled her up with the tide, but didn't care to go back against the stream or to wait till the tide turned, so he had left her where she was, and he (Tom) was to take her back to Bill Trelawn at Priarton.

'Well, I can take her for you to Mr William Trelawn at Priarton,' said Winifred, smiling. 'It simplifies things very much, doesn't it? I am Mr Mount's daughter.'

'Mr Mount's daughter?'

'Of Monkswood over there,' said Winifred.

'Be *you* Mr Mount's daughter?' said the man again.

He looked at Winifred curiously. The woman

evinced the same interest. The two looked at each other.

'Will you trust me?' said Winifred.

'Yes, miss, I *will*.'

'You're right, Tom,' said the woman.

'I'm right,' answered her husband.

They looked at each other again. Winifred could not but remark that her name had for them some association which was unknown to herself. The incident made her vaguely uncomfortable. It was as if her appearance had dissipated a conception which had been formed of her.

The man led her down to the place where the boats were moored. She was half-minded now to refuse the thing for which she had asked, but his manner disarmed a resentment which, after all, it would have been illogical to direct against him. The foe, if foe there was, was unknown, and he intended to be her champion. If it were not that the situation was uncomfortable it would have been entertaining. That she should need a champion! So it was in a mood that wavered between wrath and amusement that she followed her guide.

She studied him as she went. He was a big young man, with a deep broad chest and strong sunburnt arms. They were of a colour a few

shades redder than that of the ruddy sunburn of his face. His expression was honest and open.

'You can't miss Bill Trelawn's, miss. His boats 'll be staring you in the face over agen the pier. You be so good as to tell him, miss, that it's the canoe Tom Undercliff was to 'a' brought him down this evening. He'll know about it.'

'Very well,' said Winifred.

She feared then that she had spoken abruptly, and she added,—

'I shall tell him that you were good enough to give me the pleasure of paddling down in it.'

He held the canoe steady for her.

'Step into her now, miss. Step off the big boat. I'm afraid I can't get her no nearer, miss. Hold on to my shoulder. There, that's right.'

He put the paddle into her hand refusing to take any reward for his trouble. When she looked back, he was standing with his hat off looking after her. As she shot under the arch of the bridge he turned and went back to the cottage.

Winifred, who had only done such boating as the artificial water in the gardens at Choseville provided, found, nevertheless, to her satisfaction, that she had her tiny craft well under control, and that the manipulation of the paddle presented small difficulty to her deft hands. The current was

strong at first, and carried her swiftly on to the broader sheet of water which moved less rapidly. Here the girl, whom she had observed from the road, was still paddling about leisurely. She had a book on her knees, and she was reading desultorily. She glanced up from it as Winifred passed, and looked at her inquisitively; then, as if realising her identity, with deliberate intensity. The look was so prolonged and so fixed in its purpose, that Winifred, with surprise, was relieved when she had put sufficient distance between them to be out of range of the insolent scrutiny. What did it mean, this strange bold stare? Instinctively she connected it with whatever it might be which had caused the man and the woman at the cottage to regard her so curiously.

She paddled on and tried to forget what had occurred. It was too disconcerting to be pleasant food for reflection. She had the uncomfortable conviction, either that rumour must be making itself busy with her name, or else that the cloud under which she had at one time supposed that she must be resting, and which her father had dispelled in taking her home to Monkswood, was a veritable cloud after all, and was known to her neighbours though not to herself. In spite of a contrary determination, her thoughts went back to

the conjectures that had filled her mind during the latter days of her years of banishment. Something of her old expression of rebellion and discontent found its way back into her face.

The day lost its charm for her. The surpassing clearness of the water failed to delight her. When she looked down she could see every stone and shell that lay in the bed of the river, sometimes, so greatly did the depth vary, through twelve feet of water, sometimes through two, or even less. The shallows became more frequent as the tide receded. Here and there an island of pale mud appeared above the surface. Some sea-gulls stood on one of these and rose as Winifred's canoe approached them. Their whites and greys were vivid in the bright sunlight. On the right bank, woods in which were ash and beech and oak, descended the hills to the water's edge. Here, as at Monkswood, autumn delayed its stain.

Winifred paddled absently through scenery which at another time would have called forth a silent but sincere token of her appreciation of it in the alertness of her eyes. Her forehead wore a frown. There was something that was sullen almost in the expression of her lips. Her wish now was to reach Priarton as soon as possible, hand over her canoe to its owner, and go home. Whether or not she

should speak to her father of what had occurred she had not yet decided. She had, as you know, determined to forbear for the present asking any deliberate questions as to that which she thought was being withheld from her knowledge; but this new feature which had developed in the mystery of her position gave to it a more serious aspect. If the immediate neighbourhood knew the thing of which she herself was ignorant, then was the falseness of that position unendurable.

She was nearing the town. A breeze that met her on this reach of the river put a ripple on the water. A couple of boats were ahead of her. In one of them a fisherman's little girl plied the oars that her small arms could barely lift, while her father smoked in the stern, now and then taking the pipe from between his teeth, to throw her some word of direction or encouragement. The other boat held children of various ages.

The fisherman presently knocked the ashes from his pipe, changed places with his little girl, and with strong strokes rowed rapidly away. Winifred watched him absently. She passed the other boat, and, paddling mechanically, she forgot to keep to the deeper water. She was moving at a certain rate, when of a sudden she found herself aground upon a mud bank. She made an effort to push

off with her paddle, but the impetus of the speed at which she had been going had driven her firmly on to the mud. She tried once more, and again in vain. Then she looked round her for some help. The tide was running down quickly, and, for all she knew, a few minutes might transform the bank to an island upon which she would be left high and dry. No danger attached itself to the situation, but every inconvenience. The fisherman had rowed on too far ahead to make it easy for her to attract his attention. She waited for the other boat to come up. The mud bank, she saw, shelved downwards abruptly to a couple of feet of water just below her, so that it would be possible for a few minutes at least for aid to approach her. She saw that to try to dislodge herself unaided was useless.

She had some difficulty in attracting the attention of the young crew, upon whom she relied for help in her predicament; when, however, they realised her position, they lost no time in coming to her assistance. The rescue party consisted, she found, of a lame boy of fourteen or so years, and three little girls of ages ranging from seven to twelve.

Winifred addressed herself to the boy.

'We'll soon get you off,' he said in answer. 'We often get aground ourselves like that.'

'I got stuck yesterday,' volunteered one of the girls in a shrill treble.

'And she had to get out of her canoe and push off,' said one of the others.

'And she got her feet wet, and mamma was so cross.'

Winifred laughed. The boy blushed at these family disclosures, and Winifred hastened to say that but for his timely aid she supposed that she herself would have had to get her feet wet.

The floating of the canoe, however, was not so simple a matter as he had supposed. It had driven itself firmly on to the mud, and the water had fallen during the last few moments. The boat drifted a little bit.

'Hold her up, Lolly,' said the boy.

'If Bertha was here,' said one of the girls, 'she could get round in her canoe to the other side of the bank—it's so narrow you see—and shove. But Bertha's up higher, reading.'

'There's Bertha,' cried a sister.

'Bertha,' screamed the youngest at the top of her voice. 'Bertha!'

'Shut up,' said her brother. 'Don't make such a row.' He turned to Winifred. 'I'm afraid you will have to get out,' he said. 'Can you step into the boat?'

She did so with his help. Her canoe floated then at once. He brought it round into deeper water and helped her into it. She thanked him warmly.

'I don't know what I should have done without your help.'

'It wasn't anything,' said the boy. 'I'm only glad we were there. If it ever happens again some of us are sure to be about. We are always on the river. You see, our house is so near. That's the Vicarage—up there on the hill.'

'Oh, you are the son of the Vicar of Priarton!'

'Yes; our name's Conder. I am Joseph Conder.'

'And I'm Lolly,' said one of the girls.

'Her name isn't really Lolly,' said another. 'It is Margaret Louise Sybil.'

'And mine is Eleanor Catherine Mary. She's baby, you know,' pointing to the third.

'I'm not, really,' said the child, 'I am Milicent Mowbray Olive, only I'm the smallest, you see.'

Winifred listened in amusement.

'And that is Bertha,' said the one called baby, pointing up the stream with a round, fat finger. 'Bertha is our eldest sister.'

Winifred had forgotten for the moment the girl whose insolent stare had annoyed her. Now she

saw this girl approaching. Her stare was more impudent, if possible, than before. Her words were an open declaration of hostility.

'Come away, children. You are to come home at once. Never mind what I mean. I say you are to come at once.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE impulse was strong in Winifred then and there to ask the girl what she meant by an insult which was so obvious and so obviously intentional. Her desire to confront an adversary made the temptation hard to resist. But she resisted it; and, to her own gratification, she had the knowledge that she did not colour, and the conviction that she did not turn pale, and that she kept absolute control over the muscles of her face in a position as difficult as any in which she had ever been placed in the course of her short life. These things later, in retrospect, had their resulting satisfactions. That she had emerged from a trying situation without a loss of dignity satisfied her also. She allowed the boat to move away before she herself moved. The lame boy blushed painfully and raised his cap. She acknowleged his politeness with a bend of her head.

If, however, the surface was calm, below it there was a very serious disturbance. She held herself in restraint till she was out of sight, lest an out-

ward sign of it should be expressed in her back, or the way she held her head, or the movement of her paddle. She heard a subdued, but none the less furious, battle of words taking place between the lame boy who had aided her and the girl whose insult still rang in her ears.

She was glad when she had given up her canoe to its owner and was on the road to Monkswood.

The day was closing in. There was for the first time in the air a keenness that was the breath of autumn. Leaves would turn and fall in the days that were to come.

Winifred passed quickly through the narrow streets of Priarton, and climbed the steep hill up which the road twisted. Some building operations were in course of progress, and a pony and a mule yoked to a cart filled with heavy stone blocked her path midway. The animals strained laboriously under the weight of their load. A boy with whip and gentle persuasion encouraged them to their task. Winifred waited for a few moments till they should reach a wider bit of the road and enable her to pass. Priarton now lay below her. Its roofs were huddled closely together and looked like those of a foreign town—a Moorish town, Winifred thought, but without certain conviction, since her impression could only have been traceable to some

picture she had seen. From where she stood no streets were to be distinguished, nor scarcely a break in the crowded shelves of grey and sloping slates. From a pole thrust out of the window of a house hung brown drying nets. The church tower stood up squarely from the midst of the clustering roofs.

The boy led his uneven team to the side of the road, and motioned to Winifred that there was room for her to pass. She continued her way. The summit, when she reached it, brought the sea into view, some hundred feet below. A short stone pier, little more than a breakwater, and without rail or wall, jutted out into the water. The people on it looked like flies. On the further side of it was the mouth of the river. Beyond this trees grew in the rock down to the edge almost of the sea itself. The rock was of a brown colour, that warmed in places to red.

Winifred followed for some three hundred yards the road that skirted the cliff. A wall of stone and earth, with a coastguard path along the top of it, shut out the wider view of the sea. A lane came down suddenly to meet the road. She took this turning, and presently left it when she reached the stile that marked the beginning of the path across the fields that led to Monkswood.

The restraint which she had put upon herself had by this time served to mitigate something of the fierceness of her wrath. Though Miss Conder was now the symbol as well as the embodiment of the hostile circumstances against which Winifred had had to fight all her life, she had no wish to hurl herself upon her and rend her. Neither did her passion rend herself. She walked quietly, with a set mouth. She emerged presently on to the high road along which she had driven to Monkswood upon her arrival. She reached the house without having decided whether or not she should speak to her father of what had occurred.

Chance determined the matter. Her father met her as she went in. She was too full of her own thoughts at once to erase all expression of them from her face.

'What has happened, Winifred?' he asked.

'Nothing, father.'

She smiled, but not very convincingly.

'Tell me, Winifred.'

His daughter hesitated for a moment, and then made up her mind.

'I suppose when I am angry,' she said, 'I am not very good at concealing it. A thing happened this afternoon which made me very angry. Two things happened—or rather two people were in-

strumental in letting me know that for some reason or other I am a person to be regarded with distrust. Oh, I am wronging one of them. The man was very good. He made me feel that I was better than he had been led to expect!' Her tone was partly ironical, but partly (and unconsciously) wistful. 'I am wronging him still,' she added after a moment's pause. 'He made me see that he did not believe whatever it may be that he had heard of me.'

Then she gave her story. Mr Mount listened to it gravely. When he heard her out there was silence for a few moments. Winifred waited, hoping that without active measures upon her part to bring about an explanation of the situation, an explanation of it would be forthcoming. Surely her father would understand that knowledge would be her protection.

'You are sure that by no possibility you could have imagined this?' he said at last.

'The intention to insult me?'

He nodded.

'By no possibility. It was deliberate.'

'You see, from what you fancied you had detected in the manner of the boatman, you had the conviction that something had been said of you—don't you think it not improbable that you exaggerated the curiosity anyone might feel in the

appearance of a stranger into the insolence of a stare?'

Winifred shook her head.

'It was not fancy, father. The man and his wife had heard something of me, and were surprised to find me so harmless. I did not imagine this, and there could be no mistake in the gratuitous rudeness of Miss Conder. Believe me, it was meditated. She called the children away as if I was not a fit person for them to associate with. And she meant me to know it.'

A recollection of the incident caused Winifred's face to flush. She recalled even a certain triumph in the face of her adversary, as if the opportunity to offer the insult had been grateful.

'How vulgar and horrible it was!' Winifred said.

'It was insufferable. I shall go and see Mr Conder about it to-morrow.'

'Oh, don't do that,' said Winifred. 'It would be making a fuss about a thing that I want to forget. I want to forget it at once.'

'I cannot let it pass,' said Mr Mount. 'I shall send a note in to Priarton to-night, to say that I mean to call at the Vicarage to-morrow. He shall account to me for his daughter's conduct.'

'Can't you account for it yourself?' said Winifred suddenly.

She had not intended to force matters by so small a move even as that of her question. She wished to recall the words almost as she spoke them. But a moment showed her to her relief and regret that she had not brought about the consummation she feared and desired. The sincerity of her father's answer surprised her.

'No,' he said, 'I cannot account for it at all.'

He looked at her wonderingly. The truth of his assertion was not to be doubted. This seemed to Winifred to disconnect the thing they were discussing from those other things which were withheld from her. This being so, the subject lost for her its more immediate importance, and she was so far able to let it rest as to go up to her room to take off her coat and hat. When she had done this she went to her sitting-room, and, as dinner was still distant, she rang for some tea.

Mr Mount called Dalton into the study, and told him to shut the door. The man did as he was told, and stood waiting.

'I suppose there is a lot of gossip about Miss Mount at Priarton?' Mr Mount said abruptly.

'There's some excitement, sir, of course.'

'What sort of things do they say?'

Dalton looked down sideways at his striped coat and twisted one of its linen buttons.

'Well, sir,' he began, and paused.

Mr Mount looked annoyed.

'You may say what you have heard,' he said shortly.

'Well, sir, you know there's always been a good deal of talk about you, sir; living solitary as you have, sir, and not—well, not encouraging visitors, they've talked about you a bit. That we must almost expect.'

'That, as you say, we must almost expect, Dalton.'

Mr Mount was smiling. He crossed over to the window as he spoke and sat down on the sill with his back to it.

'Pardon me, sir,' said Dalton, following him and closing the lattice, 'you're not going to have it open behind you.'

He returned to where he had been standing then, and continued,—

'Well, they've seen Miss Mount, of course, some of them. The parson's lady saw her driving with you, and others have met her out walking, and some of 'em saw her arrive, and—and they're just talking, sir, that's all.'

'I know they're talking, and I want to know what they say.'

Well, you don't go to church much, you know,

sir, and they talk about that; and Miss Mount hasn't been to church yet, sir, and they talk about that.'

'H'm,' said Mr Mount.

He looked at Dalton thoughtfully, and then turned partly round and looked out of the window.

'Mrs Conder,' proceeded Dalton, 'gave a sort of an At Home afternoon tea affair at the Rectory, and a good bit of talking was done there, sir. I'm told they discussed whether they should call upon Miss Mount and—'

'And?'

'Well, they decided not to, sir. They said they didn't approve of you, sir, and—'

Dalton met his master's smiling eye and chuckled respectfully. He returned to gravity a moment later.

'Mrs Conder, I hear, said that it was evident you were under a cloud, sir, and then said something else which Mr Conder said she'd no business to say, and shut her up, I'm told, very sharp.'

'What was it?'

'Well, that they'd none of them ever heard of your having a daughter, sir, and how were they to know that she was your daughter?'

CHAPTER XIII

IT is an evil and ill-conditioned world, perhaps, apart from which a man cannot live, but wagging tongues must make themselves busy with his concerns. Winifred's father was not of the type of man to care what was said or what was thought of himself. The inhabitants of Priarton were of a class far removed from his own, and it is probable that he held their opinion in supreme and conservative contempt. But that Winifred should be involved in the disfavour with which he himself was regarded, and that her name should be lightly spoken by slanderous and disrespectful lips, was, to judge by the expression of his face, another matter.

He sent for his daughter.

Winifred had recovered something of her usual composure, and had settled herself comfortably on a couch with a book when Dalton brought up the the message. She rose at once and followed him

to the study. He opened the door of it and retired.

Mr Mount was standing by the hearth. It chanced that, as he stood, the light that fell directly on to his face was tinged by the colour of the coat-of-arms which some dead and gone owner of Monkswood had emblazoned upon the lattice windows. The light was not very strong, and, stained faintly by the dominant blue of the ground of the design, it gave to his face an appearance that caused Winifred throughout the interview an undefined discomfort.

'I have been speaking to Dalton,' he said, without preamble; 'and I find that there is talk about you in Priarton.'

He paused as if he expected some exclamation from her, but she waited.

'The head and front of your offence seems to be that you are under the roof of a man who has made it plain that he wants no visitors. My isolation is at the root of the matter. No one will call upon you. This I understand has been settled. I am to blame for the whole thing. The fact is, Winifred, I have given offence right and left. Now people fight shy of me.'

Strange thoughts, fugitive, half-formulated, hardly acknowledged, passed through Winifred's

mind. The cloud hung over her father, perhaps, and not over herself. His past held that which made it necessary that he should shun men. Almost it seemed so.

She looked at him wonderingly. The bluish light upon his face laid insistent stress upon the delicacy of it. Her thoughts, vague and shapeless as they had been, smote her with a sense of treason and disloyalty.

She went over to him and laid her head against his shoulder.

'Do you think I mind?' she said softly. 'Do you think I mind whether I am called on or not?'

'I daresay you don't, just now,' said her father. 'But you will when the novelty of Monkswood has worn off. The whole thing has been a mistake, Winifred. I ought never to have brought you here.'

'Father!'

'I ought to have known that the life I lead here would compromise you. It isn't only the dulness of the place that I mind for you. I appear to have done the very thing that I wished to avoid. My God, Winifred, I owe you an apology for the insult which fell upon you to-day.'

He drew his hand quickly across his forehead.

Winifred caught it and held it fast in her own.

'Father, father,' she said, 'do you think I care? I don't want anyone to call upon me. Miss Conder may insult me to my face again if she likes. I shall probably strike her if she does, but what matter.' Winifred paused and smiled at the thought. 'But don't say you regret having let me come home, father; don't say that. I have been happier here than I have ever been in my life. Ask Elsie Luttrell what I have written to her. Ask Madame de Valois. I want to think that you like me to be with you.'

'You know I do, Winifred.'

'Then don't talk of owing me an apology for Miss Conder's ill-breeding. Let us forget it. I don't mind it a bit, so long as—'

Winifred broke off undecidedly.

'So long as what, Winifred?'

Her father was looking down into her face. She put her two hands upon his shoulders and met his eyes with her own.

'I don't want to question you, father. I don't want to make you tell me anything that you wish to keep from me. I believe that some day you will trust me fully, and I am waiting for that day.'

'What were you going to say?'

He did not withdraw his eyes from hers, nor did she try to avert her own.

'So long as others—the people about here, the man who let me the canoe, Miss Conder—do not know something of me which I do not know myself.'

Mr Mount was silent for a few moments.

'They know nothing of you,' he said then 'What happened to-day is solely due to the fact that I have given offence. Believe this, Winifred. It is true. I swear this to you.'

Winifred smiled with dewy eyes.

'You needn't swear it,' she said gently. 'That was all that I minded — or, at anyrate, what I minded most. I think, if she had known anything of me I should have asked you outright to tell me, because I care for nothing that I can face. Always know this of me, father, I want to face things. It is almost my watchword. It isn't pluck nor even an empty boast. It is temperament.'

He kissed her on the forehead as she finished speaking, but abruptly, and he looked at her meditatively.

An unusual silence reigned between them that evening. Mr Mount was preoccupied, and his forehead wore an anxious frown. What his daughter had told him had evidently disturbed him not a little. Dalton at dinner, watching his

master uneasily, observed that, though he helped himself to such dishes as were deferentially pressed upon him, he ate nothing. His plate left him almost untouched. Winifred made an attempt at talking, so long as the meal was in progress; but, speedily recognising the fact that, for the time being, conversation was impossible, she did not linger at the table while her father drank his port, as was her general custom, but made her way to the hall.

A fire was burning brightly on the open hearth. The curtains had been drawn across the door. The lamps threw a pleasant glow upon the polished boards. Winifred drew a big wicker chair on to the rug that lay before the blazing logs. She lay back idly, without book or work, and thought.

For the first time her father had acknowledged that he was keeping something from her. This at least she had gained—if gain it could be counted—from the events of the day. He had not confessed his reticence in so many words, it was true; but, by failing to refute her statement of what was at the most but a surmise, he had established it as a fact. Furthermore, she had thus had an opportunity of impressing upon him that which to her fervent belief was the sole means by which she could attain to rest.

Mr Mount came out presently from the dining-room. His face wore the same look of preoccupation. Winifred rose and pulled a chair forward for him. He sat down in it absently. Not a dozen words passed between them. Winifred read a book to cover her disinclination to talk, and Mr Mount smoked his cigar.

So passed the evening strangely.

CHAPTER XIV

THE year seemed to plunge from late summer to mid-autumn. Leaves fell and were swept in gusty whirlings along the roads and against the windows of the house. There were heavy rains. The nights became chilly, and stormy winds shook the casements and banged unlatched doors. The permanent sound of the sea changed from gentle lappings to the thunders of surging breakers.

Winifred watched the change of the year with interest and regret. Dalton had kept her father to his room on the day that followed that of the events of the last chapters. Winifred sat with him and read to him. He had wanted to drive into Priarton in the morning to have an interview with Mr Conder, and he chafed at the delay. Dalton refused to let his master go out on the next, and Winifred prevailed upon him not to write. A third, a fourth, and a fifth day passed without its being possible for him to go. On the sixth, the weather having somewhat improved, he expressed

his determination to go. He seemed better, and Dalton raised no serious opposition.

'You must take me with you, sir,' he said, when he found that Winifred was not to accompany her father.

'I suppose I am in your hands,' said Mr Mount, with half irritable and half-amused resignation.

Winifred saw them start. She went back to the house. The rooms looked cheerless she thought. She felt oppressed. She went to her window and gazed out at the sea. It was grey with angry streaks of white. There was something that was desolate in the aspect of the lonely shore. The waves that broke upon the rocks splashed the spray high. She thought of the Channel and the stranger whom she had offended. She wondered again whether she would ever meet him, and in her mood of the moment she said to herself that such a contingency was improbable. She turned from the window and went to the fire.

It was while she was standing listlessly beside the hearth that two telegrams were brought to her.

'I expect they're for the master,' said the maid who handed them to her; 'but I know he likes them opened, so I thought I'd better give them to you, 'm.'

Winifred looked at the two envelopes. They

were addressed merely to 'Mount,' which gave no clue as to whether it was for herself or her father that they were destined.

'They are probably for Mr Mount,' she said, putting them on to the mantelpiece. 'I am not expecting any message.'

The maid eyed them with curiosity.

'I thought perhaps you'd like to open them, 'm,' she said.

'I shall leave them till Mr Mount returns,' said Winifred.

Her tone conveyed an intimation of finality. The maid moved towards the door.

'It seems a pity the messenger missed the master on his way,' she said. 'You see he comes by the short cut across the fields. If he'd have come by the road it 'd have saved a deal of time, because, then, he'd been sure to meet the dog-cart. That's the worst of short cuts. They're a long way round. Dear, dear! to think that perhaps there's deaths or catastrophies in those two bits of paper, and all this time wasted.'

'I daresay the delay is not of much importance,' said Winifred.

'Or else Mr Dalton, he always has orders to open all telegrams,' said the girl, with her fingers on the handle of the door. 'You see, you never

can tell what mayn't be in them. When my sister's 'usband died—'

'That will do, Elizabeth.'

Winifred turned to the fire that the maid might not see her smile. When the door was closed, Winifred glanced at the envelopes. She was about to examine them when a sound outside warned her that the girl was returning. She was determined not to gratify her idle curiosity.

'The messenger is downstairs, 'm, and perhaps there's an answer. Is he to wait, 'm?'

'He need not wait.'

'Or else he generally takes back the answer with him.'

'He need not wait,' said Winifred.

She smiled again, partly at her own perversity. She let five minutes pass before she allowed her interest in the envelopes to evince itself in a contemplation of them. They were not of the yellow that would have proclaimed the place of their dispatch British. Up to the moment of remarking that they were from abroad Winifred had taken it for granted that they were intended for her father. Choseville and Madame de Valois came suddenly and vividly before her. Something in the suddenness of the thought struck her. She handled the envelopes uneasily. She went over to the window

and looked out once more at the sea. There was purple in the distance. An angry cloud hung menacingly low in the sky. The shingle was swept back by the waves as they receded, and it gave a cry as of a world in pain. Winifred opened the telegrams. They were for herself. They had been sent at an interval of an hour, and one of them had been delayed in its transit. The first she broke open (which was the second in point of the order of sending) told her of Madame de Valois' death; the second (which should have been the first, and had been designed as a preparation for the tidings contained in its fellow) of her serious illness. Thus were the gates of Choseville closed for ever.

Winifred, tearless and almost unmoved, stood a the window and continued to look at the sea. She waited to feel emotion. She expected at every moment to be seized with the grief which must be hers. Madame de Valois was dead. How deep was the purple of the distant sea. Madame de Valois was dead. There was a thin streak of light marking the horizon. That was a big wave that broke then on the shore. How it sped up the bank of pebbles. How they shrieked as it washed them back. Madame de Valois was dead. It did not appear to matter. Choseville was misty. Madame herself seemed to have receded a long

long way into the past. She was dim. Her outlines were hazy. Winifred could not remember quite what her voice sounded like. What bird was that amongst the gulls? It had a red bill. Puffins were not to be seen on the coast of Cornwall, and, besides, they had not red bills. Moreover, puffins were big birds, and this one was scarcely larger than a gull. Winifred laughed a little. What had made her think of puffins? It was ridiculous. Black Alice had called them pooffins one day when Madame de Valois had given a half-holiday to the school, that she might take her girls to hear someone lecture on natural history. Madame de Valois had worn the long black earrings with the monstrous jet drops that jingled when she moved her head. The earrings were not hazy. Winifred could see them quite well. They were very old fashioned, and some of the girls used to laugh at them. What was Black Alice doing now? How 'greedy' she used to be about the swing. How Elsie Luttrell enjoyed turning her out of it. How irreponsible Elsie always was. Two notes recurred inconsequently to Winifred's memory. 'Mademoiselle is so sweet to-day, I think she must be ill; but then she had a bath last night, so she is not quite herself;' and another, that was from Elsie, banished to an attic for punishment, and describing

the looking-glass by which she was expected to dress: 'When I walk up to it my left jaw gallops up the side of the frame, my right remains stationary, but melts into blurred indistinctness, and my other features walk sedately away in zigzags. And all this for blackening my eyelashes with the head of a match to see how they would look.'

Elsie was always in mischief. How nice she was. Madame de Valois could never be angry with her for long. Madame was dead. It meant very little, dead, did'n't it?

So ran the thoughts of Winifred Mount. It was in vain that she tried to realise the sadness of the knowledge that she would never see the kind face again. Tears seemed to have no occasion.

'Am I without any feeling?' she said to herself. It horrified her to think so. She set herself to remember the thousand and one little acts of kindness which the schoolmistress had done her. She went over many of the early years of her life, selecting from each period some example of the affection which had been bestowed upon her. One incident was impressed firmly upon her mind. As a little girl of seven she had run away in a fit of uncontrolled passion from the governess who was taking the school out for their walk. She had hidden herself in an old tool-house in the Chose-

ville public gardens. There she had remained till hunger and darkness drove her impenitently home. A search had been instituted in the meantime, and the schoolhouse was in a state of tumult. Winifred went up to the front door and walked boldly in. She was met by a chorus of question and welcome. Then by degrees she was told of the dire fate that hung over her head.

'Madame said you were to go to her the minute you came in,' said a girl. 'I wouldn't be you for something, Winifred.'

'I don't care,' said Winifred.

She strode with an ostentatious indifference as to what might await her to the door of madame's room. No one ever knew what passed during the interview which there took place. When Winifred emerged thence she was crying softly.

She thought now of the rebuke which had been suddenly cut short by the yearning cry of the administrator of it, and of the opening of the arms into which she had cast her contrite little body.

Madame was dead.

Winifred thought of the last day at Choseville; the garden; the tender silence of the evening; the rose.

How grotesque it was to try to feel sorry. She

smiled absently. The cloud had deepened above the sea. She began to hear again the thunder of the waves. There was another sound.

She listened. It was the sound of wheels on the gravel. She opened her window and looked out. It was the dog-cart returning. Something must have been forgotten. There had not been time for the drive into Priarton and back to be accomplished. She hurried down to the hall, conscious of something within her that was more than mere curiosity. The dog-cart came into sight on the drive as she reached the door. She caught her breath. Dalton held the reins, and her father was leaning heavily against his shoulder, while with one arm his servant supported him as best he could.

Then Winifred knew that her father was dead, and that she stood alone.

CHAPTER XV

SOME thirteen months later, Lady Lambeth, a woman well known in London, and then emerging from the second year of her widowhood, had her attention arrested by the beauty of a girl in deep mourning, who sat two pews ahead of her in the church in which she was wont to worship.

The small excitements attendant upon Lord Lambeth's death, excitements dreary enough in themselves, but occupying in their nature, were long since over, and Lady Lambeth, wearied and in her prime, looked about for some diversion.

Sunday after Sunday came the girl in black to St Sloane's Church. She was tall, slender, but not thin, and very fair. Perhaps the deep black of her clothes made her fairness the more fair. Her complexion had that rose-petal delicacy that sometimes accompanies vigorous health.

Lady Lambeth speculated about her through many psalms, many litanies, many sermons. She

contemplated her closely. The resolute mouth appealed to her love of strength. She was not very firm herself, and her own opinions, to her own knowledge, took their colour to some extent from those of her friends, a thing which seemed to her to be rather contemptible, and consequently (or oddly, if you will) she had a great reverence for such qualities as courage, steadfastness, and the like. To these she would have added uprightness and truth. Generations of worldly ancestors perhaps had their part in the strain of polite insincerity which she herself deplored, and which lent her manner so much of its superficial charm. She was conscious of the inherence of her tendencies and did not take active measures to make herself what she was not. But it was just that which she was not that she admired in others. She found herself looking forward to Sunday mornings for the sight of the lonely girl whose beauty so much impressed her. She herself knew not what solitude meant. She was (also by inheritance of taste) a confirmed entertainer. The embassy at Phillipopolitzburg had therefore furnished her with an excuse for indulging her hospitable inclinations to the top of her bent, and her life in the diplomatic days had been very full.

After Lord Lambeth's death, which followed

closely upon his resignation, his widow's drawing-room in Park Street continued to be the resort of her numberless friends. Lady Lambeth lived, and had always lived, in a crowd; and, out of it, at a moment when her weeds forbade her to join in its amusements, she looked at the isolation of Winifred Mount with wonder and admiration.

But Lady Lambeth had what a certain Maud Athol (and in this Miss Athol was unconsciously the mouthpiece of very many other of Lady Lambeth's acquaintance) described as a passion for 'running' girls, and it was the loneliness of Winifred which, while it had had its potent attraction for her, she dearly wished to remedy. She was never so happy as when she was piloting some creditable *débutante* through a season, and she had a reputation for 'discovering' beauties. To three portionless or otherwise handicapped girls, singled out, however, from among the daughters of men by virtue of their beauty, had she given such advantages as without her would never have reached them. The last of the three she had married a few years previously to the young peer who later succeeded Lord Lambeth at the embassy at Phillipopolitzburg, and she was feeling unemployed.

To Lady Lambeth, then, in this case, came the sight of the unknown Winifred Mount. She did

not realise how keen her interest in the lonely girl, whose only companion seemed to be the maid who sometimes accompanied her, had grown, till a chance Sunday found the place in which she always expected to see her empty. She was stricken almost with dismay. She watched for her, even turning round more than once till such time as, by the rules of the church, vacant seats were appropriated by the general public. Then she looked about her, peering down long avenues of heads till she was blocked in her search by the hat of some woman which closed the vista, as houses or a wall close a blind alley. She caught here and there at some black-robed figure or some gleam of shining hair; but they did not belong to Winifred. By the end of the second lesson Lady Lambeth was assured that the face she sought was not within the radius commanded by her own seat. She behaved oddly upon this Sunday in question. She sat down occasionally while others stood, or stood up before the exact moment of the rising of others. Her search was not rewarded. After the service she lingered at the door, shaking hands absently with her friends, and looking at the throng of people emerging from the great red building.

It was not an unusual thing for members of the congregation of St Sloane's to crave a few moment's

audience with their vicar in the vestry at the close of the service.

A friend of Lady Lambeth touched the arm of a paid and patient companion,—

'I am sure, poor dear thing, she felt that she had had a special message in his allusion to childlessness. Did you notice her face while I was talking to her? I don't think she heard a word I said. She was looking back at the door in a sort of rapt way—(Really, Miss Thing, how stupid you are. I told you to stop the halfpenny omnibus; that's the penny one. We will go down to the corner where they start.)—a rapt way. I am sure she had sent in to him to know if he would see her.'

Thus did one, at least, of the acquaintances of Lady Lambeth account for her loitering. In point of fact, the allusion to childlessness had escaped her. She watched the last worshipper leave the building, and then went home depressed to Park Street. Her anxiety was not inconsiderable until the reappearance of Winifred in her accustomed chair on the next Sunday morning set at rest the fear lest she should have gone.

Since Winifred lived in a flat in Sloane Street, it had not been difficult to learn either her address or her name, but here Lady Lambeth's information

stopped short. She pointed her out to one or two of her own friends who were unanimous in their praise of her beauty, but who were equally ignorant of her antecedents. Then Lady Lambeth, since she was discreet, and saw that it might compromise Winifred to draw attention to her isolation, ceased to make inquiries. She cast about for some conventional method of forming her acquaintance.

Winifred herself meanwhile was all unconscious of the interest she evoked in one who was a stranger to her. The loneliness of the year that had elapsed since her father's death, and that had seen her farewell to Monkswood and her settlement in London had been unspeakable. The Luttrells had been away from Park Lane for a considerable part of it, and Winifred had found herself without a friend. She had occupied herself as best she could in the arrangement and decoration of the flat she had taken. This filled her thoughts for a time. But there came a day when all was done, and she sat down with idle hands and wondered to what good were her labours.

Out of the emptiness of her life she watched the lives of others. She saw happy girls—they looked happy—shopping in Bond Street; stepping out of their carriages; walking with their parents, or their brothers, or their friends. She longed to attach

herself to some human being. When the Luttrells returned to London she watched the life of Elsie.

Miss Luttrell's success socially had been assured since the night of her first ball. Had she wished it she might have changed her lot long since, but, for whatever reason, she had hitherto resolutely refused to marry.

Perhaps Winifred's leisure allowed her to remark small things which, under other circumstances, would have escaped her. Be this as it may, an idea formed itself in her mind one day when she was at the Luttrells. She had observed that, while Agatha Twine did not write much to Elsie, nor gushingly of her, Elsie seemed to be attracted to everything connected directly or indirectly with the Twines, and spoke often of Agatha and kindly.

Mrs Luttrell, on this particular day, was writing notes in a little room off the drawing-room where Winifred and Elsie were sitting. The talk had turned upon Agatha, from whom it chanced that Winifred had heard that morning.

'She wrote from a place called White Acton,' Winifred said.

The expression of Elsie's face thereupon called Winifred's own attention to the name. A strange moment followed. Two things seemed to be happening. She knew them to be unconnected. The name

evidently had some association for Elsie, but it awoke also a vague and elusive emotion in herself.

'Why has it a familiar sound to me?' she said.

The girls looked at each other curiously. Winifred in a flash, and involuntarily, went through, in retrospect, some of the emotions she had experienced at Monkswood. Without consequence (apparent to herself) she thought of a water-colour and her mother's portrait.

'I cannot say,' said Elsie.

Her voice called Winifred's thoughts from herself to her friend, and to a further remarking of her expression.

'White Acton belongs to Agatha's cousin, Percy Twine,' Elsie said.

The words seemed to be drawn from her against her inclination.

Then Winifred, putting aside the intangible and and fleeting sensation she herself had momentarily felt, noted only the demeanour of Elsie and formed her conjecture. The next few sentences that were spoken strengthened it.

'Agatha disapproves of me,' Elsie said. 'She thinks that our set is noisy. Perhaps it is. Do you remember how I shocked her at Choseville when I sang the thing I always call now a Song of Sorts?'

She broke into a laugh.

'I can kick higher now, Winifred. You don't know how I have improved.'

She became suddenly grave.

I wonder how much harm can be done to you by one person who disapproves of you? You don't think any real harm could be done, do you?'

Winifred, thinking of her own wish to fight her enemies, and of Miss Conder, was about to reply. But it chanced that this was the moment when a turning point was to be reached in her life, and when Lady Lambeth's search was to be ended.

CHAPTER XVI

WINIFRED and Elsie would probably have continued to talk when Mrs Luttrell came forward from the inner room to receive her visitor, but Lady Lambeth contrived that the conversation should be general. Several times she singled out Winifred to address to her a trifling remark, and once she asked her opinion definitely upon some topic of current interest.

From that moment, so it seemed to Winifred afterwards, dated her friendship with the widow of the late ambassador at Phillipopolitzburg. It was then, at least, that she looked at Lady Lambeth to see what manner of woman she was. The kindness of the face attracted her. There was a subtle air of worldliness and of love of life that in the dulness of the days upon which she had now fallen had its fascination. Winifred, in her loneliness, seemed to be outside all the things which gave to existence its joy.

Lady Lambeth's weeds could not rob her seductive figure of its symbolism. Winifred instinctively felt her to be the outward expression of much for which she longed.

Lady Lambeth, upon her part, was in a little flutter of suppressed excitement. She had ceased to expect, in the course of her daily round of visits, to hear anything of the stranger who occupied her thoughts so persistently. It was the mere chance (so far as she knew) of having seen by her visiting-book that she had not called at the Luttrells for some time that took her to Park Lane that afternoon, and, much as she liked Mrs Luttrell and Elsie, a certain perversity of mood had even made her hope, when she saw her footman standing at the door after ringing the bell, that the answer he would bring to her would be 'Not at home.'

It was almost with a start that, in the girl who sat talking to Elsie at the moment she herself was announced, she recognised Winifred Mount.

When the half-hour after five was struck, Winifred began to draw on her gloves, and presently rose to go. Lady Lambeth rose too.

'Won't you let me give you a lift?' she said, 'if our directions are at all the same. Which way do you go?'

'That is very kind of you,' said Winifred. She hesitated for a moment, and then answered frankly, 'I live in Sloane Street.'

'And that is my way,' said Lady Lambeth. 'I am going to the Ventnors in Lennox Gardens.'

She decided her direction with her pleasant smile, and no hesitation whatever.

A couple of minutes later Winifred stepped into Lady Lambeth's dainty brougham. It expressed its owner just as its owner expressed the world in which she lived. A red book was dominant in Winifred's impression.

Lady Lambeth launched out in praise of the Luttrells.

'Elsie is my dear friend,' said Winifred.

'You have known her a long time?'

'We were at school together—at Choseville.'

'Now, let me see,' said Lady Lambeth; 'I know something of Choseville. There is a school there kept by—dear me, how I forget names—it is the name of a queen. . . .'

'Madame de Valois.'

'That's it. She should be Marguerite. Is she?'

'She is dead,' said Winifred; 'and she was not Marguerite. She was Caroline.'

'So you were at school there—and Elsie Lut-

trell. I didn't know that. Was Lady Twine's daughter there with you?'

'Agatha?' said Winifred. 'Oh, yes.'

'The Twines are old friends of mine,' said Lady Lambeth. 'How has Agatha turned out? How has she grown up? I always thought her the least bit prim.'

Winifred laughed.

'Still?' said Lady Lambeth.

'Conventional is the word, I think,' said Winifred, smiling.

A sight of the Park gates reminded her suddenly of her first drive in London. She had seen the same bit of the town many hundred times since then, but for some reason at this moment it recalled to her the hopefulness of that day. Then Choseville had been behind her, and before her an untravelled country. Part of this country she had since explored. Monkswood was behind her. She stood more lonely now than before.

She heard Lady Lambeth's voice through the reverie into which she had fallen. As she heard it, it seemed to her once more that the future might yet hold for her some good.

At the door of the red brick building, which contained Winifred's home, Lady Lambeth took her hand. She retained it for some moments.

'Won't you come and see me?' she said.

Winifred expressed the pleasure which the invitation gave her.

'No. 99A. You can't miss it. When will you come?'

'I—have no engagements,' said Winifred.

'To-morrow! I should like to fix a day, that I might make a point of being in. I should not like to miss you.'

'You are very good.'

'To-morrow, then. At what o'clock? Won't you lunch with me? That will be best; I want to talk to you. I will ask no one else. Will you come?'

'Indeed, I will,' said Winifred.

The brougham drove off. A lift deposited Winifred at her own door. She rang, and was admitted by Dalton.

The drawing-room did not look so empty that evening she thought. The warm glow of the firelight gave cheerful suggestion to its comfort. A pile of books stood on a low table near a deep couch. There were many flowers. A huge white chrysanthemum looked like a ball of curled ostrich feathers. Winifred paused beside the table on which it stood and marvelled at its whiteness.

At eight o'clock she went into the dining-room

and ate her solitary dinner, Dalton attending with ceremony. By half-past eight she was back again in the drawing-room. She settled herself by the fire with her books.

The evening, like every other evening, passed without event. Sometimes Winifred was fretful, and then the hours of loneliness were horrible; sometimes she was restless, and then they seemed unending; sometimes she was sad, and her eyes would fill with tears. The dulness was irksome to her. It was an ugly fate which had condemned her to solitude. More than once she turned her thoughts to the stage—but without conviction. She went to see pictures, and wished that she could paint. She read a great deal, and wondered whether she could write. She chose a name for a central figure. She thought that she would like to write about someone called Pamela. She wrote the word on two or three sheets of notepaper, and there, happily perhaps, her essay stopped. 'I want an interest,' she said to herself. The pursuit of one baffled her. She had thought at one time of looking out for a companion, but the days and the weeks and the months went by and she could not make up her mind to share her life with a stranger. The sort of woman she would like would be difficult to find, and to have about her a spirit uncongenial to

her would be insupportable. Hitherto, therefore, she had lived alone, attended by her maid, another woman servant, and Dalton. She had long since talked out her case with Mrs Luttrell.

Mrs Luttrell had all the modern views, and regarded Winifred's position as picturesque and attractive. She said that it symbolised the new independence of women. There was as yet no feminine equivalent for bachelor. Winifred lived a bachelor life in bachelor rooms; a term would have to be invented.

'I think you ought to smoke,' said Elsie's mother.

'But I don't care for it,' said Winifred.

'And later on you must give small parties,' said Mrs Luttrell; 'you might get a reputation for little dinners.'

'It sounds nice,' Winifred said to herself with a sigh; 'but it seems to me that it is not independence that I symbolise so much as loneliness.'

She had felt strange things in the room where she now sat. Life had seemed to her a mystery so inexplicable that at times the wish to have done with it all had been allowed to form itself in her mind. She had looked forward as she used to look forward at Choseville, and she had seen a vista, long

or short, of empty days; or she had looked at her hands and wondered whether there was any meaning in their shape and texture, and in the lines which she saw marked in her palms.

'Am I always going to stand on the threshold of life?' she asked herself suddenly. The years that were gone had been thus spent she thought. They had been a time of waiting. But hope ran high within her to-night. She felt that this mystic threshold was about to be crossed. What lay upon the other side? Welcome? Rebuff? What matter, so that she should pass the portal!

A vague excitement possessed her. The turning point was perhaps reached. She put down her book and went to the window. She drew the curtains and looked up Sloane Street. Lights dotted the night. Lights flashed on cabs and carriages. Lights shone so high from the windows of the huge building that was red in the daytime, and that defined Knightsbridge, that they seemed to be lights in the sky itself, where the stars were lesser lights. How the lights hurried across the top of the street. There was movement in the darkness, a movement of lights. That was like life.

Many an hour had Winifred spent at this upper window looking down upon the street. The interest

of it was unending, if sometimes it was disquieting. When it told her that she was apart from, and outside all that made existence a thing that was estimable and to be desired, then it was disquieting. When she could regard it objectively it gave her pleasure, as a book which is absorbing can take one's thoughts and give one solace. Once while the story of the street was beguiling her solitude in such a way, an incident gave her a sudden thrust of pain. She was witness to an accident. A dog-cart containing two men was run into by a hansom, and one of the men was thrown heavily to the ground. A crowd collected, during the thronging of which Winifred could see little for the press. Then the crowd broke, and when the dog-cart emerged from it the man who had been thrown out of it was leaning against his companion.

Winifred lived again through the moment that gave back to her her father dead, and in that atom of time realised the loss she had sustained. There were hours and days in which she could not gauge it.

Her loneliness, and perhaps a certain modernity in her nature, drove her to introspection. She was philosophical, rebellious, resigned, unreasonable and the like, and the unlike by turns. She despaired, and she hoped.

On the night of which I write, the movement in the street harmonised with the elation of her mood. Presently, in her contemplation of the things that passed, she lost sight of herself.

CHAPTER XVII

THE house in Park Street was big and sumptuous. It had a square hall, whence the staircase mounted to a landing which ran as a gallery across the width of the quadrangle.

Winifred, as she followed the butler up the wide marble steps, was impressed but not awed. She had, as we know, mixed little with the world, but her self-possession was inherent. A line of sufficiently creditable ancestors, ignorant as she was of their names, or their modes of life, or aught that concerned them, had steadily accumulated for her a quality of which the outward signs were, surprise at nothing, and the accepting of luxury, ease, attention, respect, as her due. She could none the less have met hardship bravely had necessity so ruled.

Lady Lambeth received her in her boudoir. This was a small yellow room with blue hangings. A portrait of the late ambassador at Phillipopolitzburg hung on one of the walls. There were a great

many photographs framed and unframed upon the tables and ledges and shelves. There were photographs in gold brocade screens upon the top of the piano. Winifred gathered from this that Lady Lambeth was fond of music, but not musical. All the chairs were deep and comfortable. A lounge with huge silk cushions and a lamp above it suggested reading and indolence. The lower half of the room was lined with bookcases. There were books in abundance. They lay about. Some French books by their yellow binding reminded Winifred of a certain shop window at Choseville.

There were a few moments of restraint after the first greeting was over. Each remembered how slight was her acquaintance with the other. Winifred was thinking with wonder of her sensations of the night before; Lady Lambeth was hoping that no disappointment was in store for her.

A small thing re-established the rapport between them. An Angora kitten, which was playing on the rug before the fire, suddenly ran up Winifred's dress and climbed with embedded claws to her shoulder.

'You dear little thing,' said Winifred, nestling her cheek against the soft long fur.

'Oh, don't you mind?' said Lady Lambeth. 'Doesn't it bore you!'

'No,' said Winifred; 'I like kittens.'

There was a pause.

'But they wound one a little sometimes,' she added.

'Is she sticking her claws into you?' said Lady Lambeth. 'Don't let her. She will scratch you.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Winifred; ('and she is not scratching me,' she put in as an after thought, and with a smile.) 'I meant—'

'But I know what you meant,' said Lady Lambeth quickly. 'They are like most of the beautiful things that one loves. They give nothing in return. I am not sure that they even *se laissent aimer*.'

The kitten jumped down.

Winifred wondered whether it was the late ambassador at Phillipopolitzburg whom Lady Lambeth had loved, and whether he had been active or passive in his affections. However this might be, she felt herself once more drawn towards his widow.

'Fickle little friend,' she said to the kitten.

Lady Lambeth helped her to divest herself of her coat, and luncheon was announced. They went to the dining-room. There was a friendliness in the smallness of the table that had been laid for them. The room itself was very large, and the furniture was somehwat ponderous. The small table gave to

the meal a sense of intimacy without which the two (or one of them) might have felt the size of the room to be oppressive.

Lady Lambeth spoke again of the Luttrells and the Twines. A common subject would introduce others. The school at Choseville and the propriety of Agatha were touched upon once more. A course of London, a season, a little knocking about, Lady Lambeth thought, would relieve Miss Twine of a primness that was out of date. Then London became the topic of conversation. Lady Lambeth mentioned one or two names.

Winifred shook her head.

'I don't know anybody,' she said frankly.

Lady Lambeth thought this odd, but did not say so. The king and Lady Lambeth's newest friend could do no wrong.

Winifred's hat cast a shadow over her eyes. 'Bewildering' was a term which was applied to them later, when Miss Mount did know people and was known of them in London. They were clear as spring water and blue as a forget-me-not. When she raised her head, so that the light smote them, Lady Lambeth could see the exquisite delicacy of the tracing of the irises.

'Aren't you always being photographed?' she said, smiling.

'I was photographed two years ago at Choseville,' said Winifred

'And you haven't been done by any of the big people in London? My dear—you must forgive me and remember that I am sitting opposite to you, so that I see you all the time!—my dear, if I were like you, I think I should spend my time in being photographed.'

Winifred was pleased and laughed.

'To what good?' she said. 'I have no one to give them to.'

'You must have friends.'

'A few school girls. I — know very few people at all, Lady Lambeth.'

Her tone changed. Something of melancholy in it or in the words themselves made Lady Lambeth look at the girl's black dress. From that she looked at the crape upon her own sleeve, and thought that mourning should make a bond between them.

'You have lost someone you loved?' she said gently.

'My father,' said Winifred.

Lady Lambeth murmured something which Winifred took for the sympathy for which it was intended. A few moments passed in silence. A servant handed a dish and filled the pause. The kitten, which had made its way into the room, played

round the august legs of a footman. He looked straight ahead in lofty unconsciousness. His expression struck Winifred as comical, and she had an inclination to laugh. By so little was merriment divorced from sadness.

Friendship established itself between the woman and the girl. It built itself quickly, but the materials were sound and the labour was honest.

'You don't know how long I have been wishing to know you,' said Lady Lambeth.'

'Me?' said Winifred.

Lady Lambeth inclined her head slowly.

'But you had never seen me till yesterday?'

'Oh, but I had!'

'Where? How?'

'I knew where you lived even.'

Again, how?

Winifred was smiling, with her eyebrows raised in question.

'I had the curiosity to find out. It wasn't curiosity quite. May I say interest? You don't know how you have interested me, do interest me.'

'I wonder why,' said Winifred. 'I have nearly lost all interest in myself.'

'Let us go back to my sitting-room,' said Lady Lambeth.

She put her hand lightly on the girl's arm. They crossed the big hall and ascended the stairs.

'Don't you pity me in this empty house?'

'I pity anyone who lives alone.'

At the top of the stairs Winifred paused to look down. A big palm spread its leaves below her. The ubiquitous kitten played round the base of a pillar. It struck Winifred that it came to much the same thing as playing round the legs of a footman. Some portraits faced her, a Gainsborough, a Sir Joshua, and a third that had not a name.

Lady Lambeth indicated the last.

'My mother,' she said.

Winifred said yes. She felt that she should say something more.

'What a sweet face,' she said. 'You have her eyes, Lady Lambeth. Aren't you thought like her?'

'Yes, there was a likeness.'

'I hardly knew my mother,' said Winifred; 'I was so young when she died—not quite three. I try to remember her. Sometimes I think that I do almost. I should like to remember her. Do you think it would be possible?'

'It is said that we never really forget anything.'

Winifred turned from the picture to her hostess.

'Then perhaps I shall remember,' she said; but she seemed to be speaking partly to herself.

They made their way to the blue and yellow room. Lady Lambeth drew up two large wicker chairs to the fire.

'I am not at home to anyone,' she told the servant who brought in coffee.

Winifred settled herself comfortably amongst the cushions. The thought that life was no longer to be a lonely thing gained with her.

'Tell me where you had seen me, Lady Lambeth?' she said presently.

'I sit near you in church.'

The admission was sufficiently prosaic.

'Let me confess at once that I have tried to find out something about you—'

'Something about me—' said Winifred.

'Oh, don't misunderstand me,' Lady Lambeth hastened to say; 'someone who knew you—someone through whom I could get to know you. I have wanted to know you so much. You mustn't mind that. I often watched you walking home from church. I have held back on purpose. Then I met you at Mrs Luttrell's. I could not let you slip. I invented my visit to Lady Ventnor, who is out of town (as I feared Mrs Luttrell might know), to make your direction mine. Now, are you angry? Do you dislike me?'

'How could I be angry?' said Winifred.

She looked into the fire, smiling absently. It was pleasant (after a year of solitude, and of realising with a gripping at the heart that she belonged to nobody, that her weal or her woe were of insignificant import) to find that someone had been watching her life with well-wishing concern. The warmth of the room, the colour, the restfulness of the chair in which she sat, the fragrance of the coffee, the scent of some violets massed in a flat bowl, all had their part in the emotions of the moment. She raised her eyes presently from the glowing coals and met Lady Lambeth's kind look.

'You give me some hope,' Winifred said; 'you make me very glad. You don't know how black the future has looked sometimes. I am so awfully alone. I have not a relation in the world—'

'Won't you tell me?'

'I think I have been alone all my life. I lived at school. I never went home for the holidays. Madame de Valois was my only friend. I loved her. But it was dreadful never to go home. The loneliness was not so dreadful then. I know that now. I was waiting, and there was something before me. Lately there has seemed to be nothing before me.'

'But your father?'

'I went to him at last. I had a few weeks of

great happiness. We had never known each other till then, or we should never have been separated. I loved him. . . . Oh dearly, dearly! He was not to blame for not having me home. I don't know why he did not, but he was not to blame. I know that. He would have told me his reasons if he had lived, but he died.'

What a meagre story it was. Winifred told it in all its bareness. She did not try to explain. If her friendship with Lady Lambeth was to progress it should stand upon a fair basis. There was an analogy between her honesty and her wish to face her antagonists.

'And so I am alone,' she added after a pause.

Lady Lambeth leant forward and put her hand gently on the girl's arm.

Will you forgive me if I ask you a question?'

'Yes, of course; I think I know what it will be. The great grief of my father's life was the death of my mother.'

'They were on good terms.'

'He worshipped her.'

Lady Lambeth was convinced of Winifred's sincerity. At the least the girl herself believed the thing she stated, and this was enough for so modern a woman as Lady Lambeth.

'So that's my story,' said Winifred. I stand,

alone, you see, and I have to make a life for myself.'

'Will you let me help you?'

'Do you think me extraordinary for telling you so much about myself?'

The thought struck Winifred that 'so little' would have expressed the case she had stated just as well.

CHAPTER XVIII

GIRLS were not often rude (or even indifferent) to Percy Twine, and a certain speech which he had once overheard, and which he had taken as levelled deliberately at him by lips which he had been admiring, for this reason, perhaps, recurred to him at undetermined intervals. He remembered the speech and the face of the speaker at odd moments. The recollection was fugitive or fixed. Sometimes the tone of the voice was recalled, sometimes the words alone.

At twenty-six Percy Twine, an orphan, an only son, and rich at that, found the world a pleasant place enough. It met him on every hand with such smiling approval that had it spoilt him it could in fairness have expected little else. But in a frank nature, oddly mixed with a knowledge of life, and a very nice discernment, lay his protection. Lady Twine, to whom Percy was uniformly delightful, had a vague impression that her nephew read her like a book, and that, fresh and ingenuous as was his face,

and enchanting as was his manner, an elusive smile flitted disconcertingly about his sleeve when she trotted out the virtues of Agatha. Agatha had such tact. Percy, with grave mouth and dancing eyes, agreed readily. Agatha could receive and entertain a roomful of guests when Lady Twine had one of her headaches. How few girls could do that! And Agatha had none of the tastes of the day. She did not do skirt-dancing nor sing equivocally to the banjo. That was true said Percy, and talked about the weather. Lady Twine could make the weather lead back to Agatha.

Percy could draw off. Occasionally he met the advances of his aunt with open banter, she but partially taking the meaning of much that he said, his uncle keenly appreciative, Agatha, when she was by, alternately blushing and frowning. The banter, incompletely as she understood it in its subtler phases, Lady Twine found more easy to meet than the twinkling of eyes in a grave face.

Agatha sometimes said to herself that she wished that her mother would not meddle. She had a certain faith in her own attractions, and would have preferred to let them take their chance. But Lady Twine believed in assisting providence. Her own mother had assisted providence in the capture of Sir William, and the wish to help was inherent.

Agatha had a shrewd suspicion that the aid tendered to the powers that be had its result in the paucity and the shortness of the visits of Percy to Twinecombe (pronounced, be it here said, Twickom) and the long intervals that elapsed between the invitations which he sent to them for White Acton. To be sure he spent a good deal of his time abroad. He was of a more or less roving disposition, and change for him spelt charm. But he was not so much away from home, Agatha was sure, as he would have had his Twinecombe relations suppose, and there were house parties at White Acton to which they were not invited.

White Acton, was, in point of fact, a black and white Acton. It had gables and long, low rooms. Percy, smoked out of his father's place in Lancashire by the uprising of a thousand chimneys, had, on attaining his majority, sold his interest in the profitable ironworks which had enriched his progenitors, and retired from a grimy country, where the earth was cinder and the trees were painted with coal dust, to a country which was green and natural. White Acton, owing to certain structural inconveniences, had been for some years in the market when Percy decided to buy it and make it his home. Ample leisure, since he had severed

his connection with the works, and ample means enabled him to set about altering such parts of the house as needed reconstruction or improvement. He built a big dining-room, a billiard-room, added some bedrooms, and enlarged the stables. When this was done, he found that he had one of the most charming of the small properties in the neighbourhood, and that, though he was a settler, he was speedily received into the inmost of the inner sets. He had, of course, friends in the county when he chose it as his abode. He came, then, to a land ready to receive him. He expected its hands; it extended its arms. He wished sometimes that people would not make it so very obvious to him that it was demanded of him that he should marry. He told himself that he was very happy as he was, and that he enjoyed his independence. The fact, indeed, that marriage was expected of him tended to make him nurse his freedom the more fondly. The young women of the county found him frank, open, a dear friend, a good comrade, and, within certain limits, even incautious, but he was not to be trapped. He had a very fair knowledge of how close to the fire he might venture himself without singeing his wings. Occasionally he wondered whether he had any to singe.

Once, strangely enough, when he had been speculating upon this nice point, there recurred to him the face of the girl who had made the rude speech.

Lady Twine, in the first instance, had invited herself to White Acton. This was before Agatha left school, and as an aunt and a mother, Lady Twine thought it her duty to explore the land.

She told Percy that women were designing, if he knew what she meant. She instanced three, and issued warnings. Miss Cubson, the daughter of the M. F. H., would, she thought, like to install herself at White Acton. Percy listened with grave attention, and duly reported to his aunt a year later the marriage of the lady in question to the son of a wealthy peer. A Miss Brown (her name was Brown-Lymington, but Lady Twine insisted upon calling her Miss Brown) was another of those under suspicion of conspiring at the consortship of White Acton. Percy knew at the time that Miss Brown-Lymington thought the sun rose and set in a friend of his own to whom she was at that moment engaged. He did not enlighten his aunt upon the state of the case, nor upon that of the third lady, who, since she was already the wife of a neighbouring squire, could scarcely, except by such means as murder or divorce, have designs upon the new-comer. There were those who had, but Lady Twine had not

chanced upon them, and Percy laughed a good deal. The years went by. Agatha left school. Percy Twine was still unmarried.

This was satisfactory, but it was also very serious. Either Agatha must secure her cousin, or else other young men must be asked to the house and encouraged. Agatha herself, having been thrown deliberately at his head, now had the misfortune to fall in love with him. Lady Twine saw the symptoms with approval and alarm.

She sounded her daughter as to what had passed between them. Nothing had passed between them. Agatha changed the conversation. She spoke of Elsie Luttrell. She had twice mentioned Miss Luttrell's name directly after that of Percy Twine.

'We ought to ask her here.'

Lady Twine raised her aristocratic nose, and said that she did not care much for Mrs Luttrell.

'She allows her daughter to dance in public,' she said, in much the same tone as might have been employed to announce that Miss Luttrell was allowed to jump through hoops or to stand on her head.

Percy Twine had spoken of the dancing of Miss Luttrell (to whom Agatha had introduced him on the occasion of a certain theatre party which we heard of at the time, and may or may not remem-

ber) as a thing of exquisite grace and perfect restraint and refinement.

Since that night, which was that of the arrival of Winifred Mount in England, Miss Luttrell and Percy had met several times in London. In town, less was expected of him than at White Acton or Twinecombe, and in the friendship which in a very short time established itself between Percy and the girl who was allowed to dance in public, he gave himself more freedom than he could permit to himself in such friendships as were jealously watched. Agatha, whose instincts were reliable if her views were somewhat narrow, had a sufficiently clear conception of the state of the case. She was quick to recognise in Elsie Luttrell a rival. She had enough intuitive discernment to know that, as a rival, Elsie must be important, but she had not the generosity to continue to like her school friend.

She agreed with her mother in her disapproval of Mrs Luttrell, and included Elsie in the disapprobation which she expressed. To Percy she dared once, but not again, to do more than covertly hint that the house in Park Lane was a little bit noisy.

'Poor Elsie,' she said (it was while she and Lady Twine were paying the visit to White Acton,

which was mentioned indirectly in a recent chapter); 'poor Elsie, I hope she won't become fast. Two or three people have told mamma they don't like the set they meet at Mrs Luttrell's.'

Percy said Mrs Luttrell's parties were charming.

'It's different for a man,' said Agatha. 'I know Lady Hurlingham was very indignant at being asked to dinner to meet Mrs—well, I won't mention names. . . .'

Percy said he thought he knew whom his cousin meant. Mrs Luttrell, he further said, had been very kind to the lady in question.

'She helped her to tide over a very delicate crisis. Practically, through the kindness of Mrs Luttrell, a woman in a false and cruel position was enabled to get out of it and was reinstated.'

Agatha raised her eyebrows. She had not known, she said, that Mrs Luttrell's name would have carried so much weight. She was very glad to hear it. But she had only repeated what she had heard, and Lady Hurlingham had said that she should not go to the house again.

Percy suggested that Lady Hurlingham was notoriously pig-headed.

'Still, it is dreadful for Elsie,' said Agatha, with the uncomfortable conviction that the deliberate

passage-at-arms with her cousin had done her own cause little good. 'Poor Elsie! She used to be quite a nice girl.'

'She takes you for her friend,' Percy said quietly.

Agatha flushed to the roots of her hair. She knew that she was laid bare before him. She had not a rag with which to cover herself from his eyes. She left White Acton with her mother at the end of the visit for which they had been asked, knowing that its term was practically so much time lost.

The wish to retrieve such grace in his eyes as she felt herself to have forfeited evinced itself in a note which Percy Twine received from her a month or two later. A big ball was about to take place in the neighbourhood of Twinecombe. Her mother was making up a party for it. Elsie Luttrell was amongst those who were coming; would he come?

Percy Twine was alone at White Acton. He had been intending to go abroad for the rest of the winter, and was wavering between Algiers and Biarritz. People wanted him to join them at each place. There was nothing to prevent him from going to Twinecombe first for a week. So he decided to accept the invitation.

CHAPTER XIX

A FEW days later, Percy Twine, in a monstrous coat that suggested comfortable travelling, collected the books and papers with which he had beguiled the hours of his journey, threw his rug to a porter, described his portmanteau, and emerged from the train on to the platform of the station for Twinecombe.

Sir William, driving a fine pair of bays, was there to meet him, and gave him a hearty welcome. Percy saw that his luggage was safely put into the cart, which already held the trunks of an earlier arrival, and swung himself up into the phaeton beside his uncle.

The usual questions of greeting were exchanged. Percy had had an easy journey. Cold? Yes; but he was armed against it. How was Aunt Victoria? Well. And Agatha? Fairly well.

'Hope you've brought your dancing legs with you, my boy. You won't have much rest. I am glad to say your aunt has got together a very creditable lot of girls. Miss Luttrell, Agatha's friend, is as pretty a young woman as I've seen for many a day — that was her luggage in the cart.'

Percy said something about his uncle as a judge of young women. It tickled Sir William hugely. He didn't mind admitting, he said, that there was a time . . . . Well! . . . .

Percy risked a remark anent his aunt.

'H'm, yes,' said his uncle.

There had been a sprinkling of snow in the morning. The roads and the fields were lightly covered with it. Over it blew a keen wind that had shaken the fine powder partly off the trees and hedges, and that made Percy's cheeks to tingle. The pale beams of a declining sun slanted down from the west, and colours were vivid. Here the twigs had the tints and the lustre of copper. The breast of a robin perched on a gate was insistently red against the snow, and the blue of the smoke rising from a cottage chimney was intense. It arrested Percy's attention, and, incidentally, he marvelled that this filmy, wreathing thing, exquisite in changing form and colour, should be called by a

common name with the soot-laden outpouring of the chimneys that had driven him from his early home to White Acton.

The horses trotted evenly along the road, that gave out a sound as their hoofs struck it, despite the layer of snow. This was too thinly sprinkled, and too powdery in its nature to muffle the pleasant noise, except where the wind had swept up the frozen particles to a deeper drift.

Sir William talked ahead. The horses had been roughed that morning. Yes, they went well together, didn't they? The near one had a way of throwing out his hindquarters going down hill, but the driver meant to break him of it. It was a small thing. And look at his action on the flat. Percy duly admired it.

'Your aunt wanted to have 'em out to-night for the ball. I think I see myself sending my carriage horses to be put in a draughty stable, with lord knows what other beasts, and then to wait for an hour, perhaps, in the snow at four o'clock in the morning! I know what girls are when they get to a ball—carriage at the door and the young women not to be got together for at least another half-dozen dances. No, no, my boy! I have hired the omnibus from the "Cap and Bells."'

Twinecombe came into sight, then disappeared as the road crossed a bridge, to reappear at a bend five minutes later. It rose out of trees on the side of a hill. The river ran below it, in the valley. A winding drive led upwards, through larches and firs, out of which some pigeons flew deeper into the wood as the carriage turned in at the lodge gates.

In the drawing-room, half-an-hour later, when Lady Twine was pouring out tea and platitudes, Percy, watching Agatha who did not look well, he thought, and Elsie who did, gathered that, though Miss Luttrell had been invited to the house, and he himself had been definitely asked to meet her, his cousin was not the less inimical to her school friend. Relations, indeed, struck him as being somewhat strained between them.

Agatha's sweetness had in it an after-taste that was not sweet. Miss Luttrell was bafflingly good-tempered. She felt, perhaps, that the manner of her meeting with Percy was under observation, and she greeted him with frank good-will. They had met last in London. She reminded him of the occasion.

'You danced,' said Percy, 'and how the Archbishop of Yorkbury applauded you. I can hear him now.'

Agatha pricked up her ears at the mention of His Grace.

'I always wonder,' she said to one of the party as she gave him her cup,—'I always wonder whether it was a skirt dance that the daughter of Herodias danced before Herod. They were so much civilised, even in those days.'

The man she addressed, unconscious that he was championing any one, said something (trite enough to be worthy of Lady Twine herself) about the dancing of Miriam, the lawgiver's sister.

Sir William brought matters to safer levels by announcing the hour at which the omnibus would start for the ball, and in the course of the next few moments a new-comer, speaking of Twinecombe, pronounced it as it was spelt.

'Twickom,' said Lady Twine, giving the syllables their accustomed value. 'It is called Twickom.'

It would be difficult to say on what superior grounds Agatha's mother derived satisfaction from the accident that she lived in a place the name of which was not to be given as it was spelt. But so it was.

'What are you writing on your cuff?' said Agatha to her cousin.

An essay, he said, in the anti-phonetic manner of a certain sporting paper.

Agatha read :—

> 'There was a young man once at Twinecombe,
> Who said "Roses! behold I will pinecombe."
> But the roses said "No,
> Take your hands off, sir. Go!
> If you don't, with our thorns we will prinecombe."'

Agatha looked at Percy and laughed. She sighed a moment later as she thought how improbable would such conduct be on the part of one rose she knew.

The game caught on. Pencils and scraps of paper were found.

Lady Twine could not be made to understand.

'But what does pinecombe mean? And oughtn't the word to be cone, not combe? Surely pinecone is the word.'

Percy explained to her that pinecombe represented pick 'em.

'And I never heard of prinecombe,' said Lady Twine.

'It's prick 'em, mamma,' said Agatha.

Her head was aching and she bit the end of her pencil as she sought vainly for a ryhme. Elsie was writing rapidly, and smiling a little as she wrote. Her smile distracted Agatha's attention; so did the movements of Lady Twine, who had crossed over to a bookcase and was running her eye along a line of volumes.

There was more or less silence in the room. The pencils were plied softly. Elsie tapped hers against her shining teeth, when she had put down her paper. Agatha, who wished to embody some meaning in her lines, had not got further than

'There was a young man once at Twinecombe,'

when Percy consulted his watch and cried,—

'Time!'

She gave an exclamation of impatience.

'I beg your pardon,' said Percy.

'Nothing,' said Agatha shortly.

Their eyes met.

The verses that were handed round and that caused so much amusement were, it must be admitted, sufficiently indifferent. In one, the lines had the feet of a centipede. In another construction, sense and metre were pushed to the wall in the struggle to fit in words that would rhyme. A list of such words was written down the margin of the paper, and the poet, it seemed, had chosen therefrom at random. Some had local allusions. Agatha's had in intention, but Agatha's had not got beyond the first line, and so did not exist.

A verse that was typical enough had reference to an incident which had occurred in the summer,—

'There was an old person of Twinecombe
Who was worried by wasps, and to flinecombe,
His handkerchief took out,
The wasps, on the look-out,
Said "Stings! into you we will, stinecombe."'

'Old person?' cried Sir William. 'How dare you? Who wrote that? You, Miss Luttrell? By George, if you did, you shall give me the first dance at the ball to-night. How did you know I was stung in the summer? Beggars! I killed 'em both.'

Miss Luttrell, laughing, shook her head.

'But you shall have your dance, Sir William.'

Percy broke in to spout,—

'There was a young lady at Twinecombe
Who, when asked for some dances, said "Pinecombe."'

'You wrote it yourself, you young reprobate,' said his uncle. 'Old person, indeed! I can't threaten to dance with ye, Percy. I've a good mind to leave you behind.'

'Put him on the roof,' said someone.

'Where I would smoke in peace,' said Percy.

Here Lady Twine interrupted the banter, to say that she had looked the matter out in the dictionary and that pinecombe was incorrect. The word, as she had known all along, was cone.

There remained one more verse to read. It was Miss Luttrell's, and, written in an extravagant

mood, for which the attitude of Agatha was partly responsible, it ran,—

> 'There was a young lady at Twinecombe
> Who said "Ceilings! you just see me kinecombe."
> Each man winked his eye,
> But the ladies said "Fie!
> Such manners, up where did you pinecombe."'

But as Percy held out his hand for it, Miss Luttrell changed her mind, and, instead of giving him the paper, she tore it up.

Agatha looked at her inquiringly.

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